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THE ITALIAN ARMY 1940–45 (1) EUROPE 1940–43

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Dedication

To Buckweed

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Author's note

For those unfamiliar with Italian Army nomenclature, note that Alpini (plural), Alpino (singular) refer to true mountain troops, with at least a degree of specialised equipment and training; and Bersaglieri (pl.), Bersagliere (sing.) to the light infantry; both categories are historically regarded as elite troops.

Designations suggesting specialist roles for infantry divisions (see key to Table A, page 38) – e.g. 'mountain' or 'semi-motorised' etc. – should be understood as largely theoretical, if not pure propaganda. In practice the issue of vehicles and other equipment fell far short of the level needed to give these titles any practical meaning.

The acronym MVSN refers to the Fascist Party's 'Blackshirt' militia units of the *Milizia Volontaria per Sicurezza Nazionale*. To avoid confusion we do not use here the Italian plural abbreviation CCNN for *camicie nere*, 'Blackshirts'.

In the photograph credits, USSME = Ufficio Storico Dello Stato Maggiore Esercito.

A short bibliography for the whole series will appear in the third volume. Details of the establishment of e.g. armoured and motorised divisions will appear in the second volume.

Artist's note

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TITLE PAGE **A private of the 227th Infantry Regiment. His M1940 jacket bears the yellow-over-green collar patches of the 'Rovigo' Infantry Division; and on his breast the 'CSIR Cross' award identifies him as one of the quarter of a million Italian troops who served on the Russian Front. (USSME)**

THE ITALIAN ARMY 1940-45 (1) EUROPE 1940-43

THE ITALIAN ARMY IN JUNE 1940

An officer photographed in a trench during the Albanian/Greek border campaign of 1940-41. He wears the M1940 grey-green uniform with captain's cuff ranking; the M1933 steel helmet with branch badge stencilled on the front in black; a holstered Beretta on a 'Sam Browne' belt; and double socks instead of puttees. He is not, however, an infantryman, but a member of a Finance Guard unit – some of these security troops would see stiff fighting in Greece (see Plate H1). In the background note the Finance Guard version of the Alpine felt hat; enlisted ranks wore black feathers from a yellow boss, officers white feathers from a metal boss. (Franco Mesturini Archives)

ITALY ENTERED THE Second World War on 10 June 1940, a full ten months after the start of the conflict. Since his appointment as prime minister – with considerable popular support – in 1922, the demagogue Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) had forged his Fascist Party government into a generally effective dictatorship under his own leadership as *'Il Duce'*, with the powerless King Victor Emmanuel III as a national figurehead. (While many outrages and murders were committed in its name, it should perhaps be noted that at least before 1943 Mussolini's regime was not guilty of the large scale, systematic barbarities of Nazi Germany.)

In May 1939 Mussolini had concluded the 'Pact of Steel', a military alliance with Germany. He had nevertheless held back from joining his Axis partner in hostilities against the democracies, because he knew that his country was ill-prepared to fight a major war against European opponents. Now, however, with France on the verge of defeat and Britain fighting alone against the might of the seemingly invincible German Wehrmacht, he took his chance. He believed that to delay any longer would put Italy at risk of losing out on the sharing of the spoils of victory. His gamble on a quick Axis victory was to prove ruinously costly for his country; it would lead to the overthrow of his 21-year rule, and to his own death.

* * *

On paper Italy had a large and fairly well-equipped army, and although Mussolini's much-quoted boast of 8 million Italian bayonets was not credible she could raise a large if unmodernised force. The Army's mobilised strength in June 1940 was 1,630,000; this would later rise to a peak of 2,563,000. The Italian Army was quite capable of fighting a one-campaign war when all the country's resources could be channelled into a national effort on one front. This had been the case in the First World War, when the Italian Army had managed to sustain a long and bitter struggle against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Now, however, she would be drawn into war on at least two fronts simultaneously, fighting large scale campaigns in both North Africa and the Balkans, and later providing a large contingent for Germany's Russian Front. This kind of total war was far beyond the capacity of Italy's limited resources.

At the outbreak of war the Italian Army had a strength of 73 divisions made up of 106 infantry regiments, 12 regiments of Bersaglieri (light infantry), 10 of Alpini (mountain troops), 12 regiments of cavalry, 5 tank regiments, 32 of artillery and 19 of engineers. The Italian Army was basically an infantry force with very little mechanisation and a shortage of the basic requirements for modern war. Much of the equipment dated

back to the turn of the century and the First World War, and many of even the more modern items were approaching obsolescence.

One telling statistic is that in June 1940 the Italian Army had a total of 7,970 pieces of artillery of which only 246 had been manufactured since 1930. A majority of the field guns in use were ex-Austrian models handed over as war reparations in 1918. Many of the guns had been improved by replacing the old wooden-spoked wheels with steel; they might look modern because of these cosmetic alterations, but the barrels were still 40 years old.

The Italian armoured force was quite formidable on paper, with over 700 tanks – a strength which compared favourably with the other powers. Closer examination, however, shows that the vast majority of these 'tanks' were in fact tankettes: tiny two-man vehicles armed with machine guns and with armour too thin to stop machine gun bullets. More modern types were in production; but as these newer models came into service they were quickly seen to be outclassed even by the British tanks – themselves hardly the most impressive in Europe – which they were to face in North Africa.

The Italian infantry division had a different structure from those of other contemporary armies in that it only had two infantry regiments and one artillery regiment on strength, whereas in most other armies a division had at least three regiments of infantry plus three or four groups of artillery. This so-called 'binary' type of division was a major weakness, even if on paper it gave the impression that the Italian Army had more formations. Many of the divisions were far from up to strength – out of the 73 on paper only some 20 were fully manned and equipped.

The MVSN

The 'Blackshirts' of the MVSN or 'Voluntary Militia for National Security' were the military arm of the Italian Fascist Party. Originally the militia had a public security role, but from the early 1930s it was militarised and was considered as Italy's fourth armed service after the Royal Army, Navy and Air Force. Raised from volunteer members of the Fascist Party between the ages of 17 and 50 (in two age classes, the older men serving in Territorial battalions), it was supposed to provide a military force of unquestioning loyalty to Mussolini's regime.

In an effort to integrate the MVSN with the Royal Army a Blackshirt 'legion' (two battalions, each nominally 670 strong) was added to each infantry division to act as a 'highly motivated' force within the formation. The introduction of the MVSN units into the order of battle of the Royal Army was greatly resented by Army commanders, who distrusted the MVSN and suspected their lack of military experience. In addition seven purely MVSN divisions were raised to fight in the Ethiopian campaign of 1935-36. Four MVSN divisions were also raised to fight in North Africa in 1940, and these were all destroyed in the early fighting. As the war progressed the more reliable and combat-worthy MVSN units were given the title of 'M Battalions'; some of these fought in both Russia and Yugoslavia as anti-partisan troops.

OPPOSITE **A group of officers leave their HQ during a pre-war exercise. From NB right to left: foreground, an Alpini lieutenant-colonel – note chevron ranking just visible on side of hat; middleground, a general commanding an army; middle-ground, an Alpini colonel with a divisional shield on his left sleeve; background, a major of the Transport Corps. All these officers wear the *'cordellino'* uniform, with two black velvet stripes down the breeches flanking a central piping in the branch colour. For rank insignia details see chart on page 41. (Rex Trye)**

The crew of a M1935 81mm mortar during a pre-war training exercise. The *caporale* has the M1937 grey-green tunic with black felt collar facings and his divisional patches. His black sleeve chevrons are the larger pattern used from 1937 to 1939. Although we cannot see it, the lanyard around his neck is probably attached to a holstered 10.35mm Bodeo Glisenti 1889 revolver. This antique was still in widespread service with the Italian Army in 1940, and was to continue in use until the end of the war. (Vitetti Archive)

1940 Infantry Division Establishment

2 Infantry Regts
of 3 bns
Blackshirt Legion
of 2 bns + Support Coy
Artillery Regt
+ Pack Gun Coy
Mortar Bn
Engineer Bn

14,300 all ranks
270 x LMG, 80 x HMG
126 x 45mm mortars
30 x 81mm mortars
8 x 20mm AA, 24 x 47mm AT
8 x 65mm, 24 x 75mm,
12 x 100mm
45 x tankettes
86 x motor vehicles
71 m/cycles, 153 bicycles

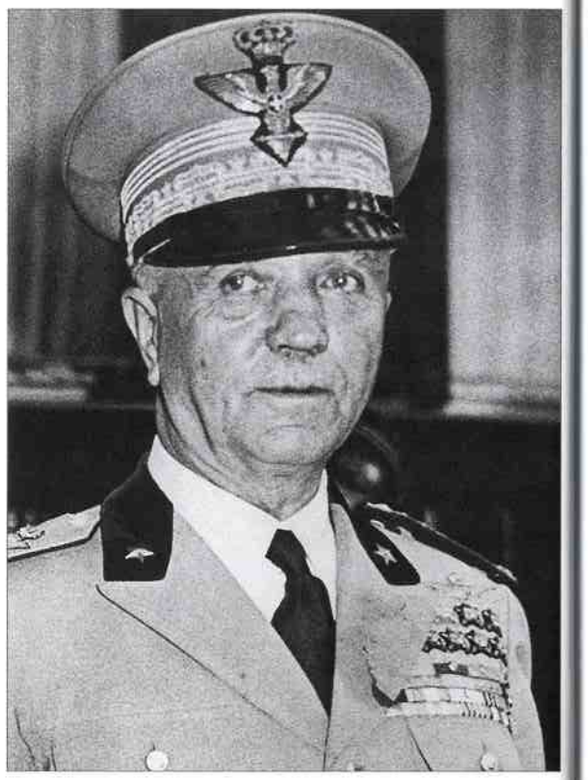
CAMPAIGNS

France

Italy's declaration of war against France and Britain on 10 June 1940 was followed on the 20th by the opening of an offensive into French territory in the western Alps and along the Mediterranean coastline. The Italian army of 32 divisions made little headway in the difficult terrain of the mountains, and only managed to capture a few Alpine villages. On the coast they managed to capture the small French Riviera town of Menton before the French surrender to the Italians was signed on 24 June. The Italian soldiers fought bravely enough, but were let down – as they were to be in future campaigns – by bad planning and organisation. (One small but telling example of the latter was the fact that the army field kitchens often did not have the necessary pots and pans to make the soldiers a hot meal in the freezing conditions in the Alps.) Italian losses for such a short campaign were heavy, with 631 killed, 2,361 wounded, 2,000 cases of frostbite and 600 men missing. This compares with the French losses of 40 killed, 84 wounded and 150 missing.

ORDER OF BATTLE
WESTERN ALPS CAMPAIGN, 20 JUNE 1940
Army Group West
GOC: Gen Umberto di Savoia
CofS: Gen Emilio Battisti
1st Army
GOC: Gen Pietro Pintor
CofS: Gen Fernando Gelich
II Army Corps
'Forli', 'Acqui', 'Livorno' Inf Divs
'Cuneense' Alpine Div
III Army Corps
'Ravenna', 'Cuneo' Inf Divs
1st Alpine Group (3 Alpine bns plus 2 mountain artillery bns)

XV Army Corps
'Cosseria', 'Modena', 'Cremona' Inf Divs
2nd Alpine Group (4 Alpine bns, 1 Blackshirt bn, 2 mountain arty bns)
Army Reserve
'Pistoia, 'Cacciatori delle Alpi', 'Lupi di Toscana' Inf Divs
'Pusteria' Alpine Div
1st Bersaglieri Regt, 3rd Armoured Regt, 'Monferrato' Cav Regt
4th Army
GOC: Gen Alfredo Guzzoni
CofS: Gen Mario Soldarelli
I Army Corps
'Superga', 'Cagliari', 'Pinerolo' Inf Divs
IV Army Corps
'Assietta', 'Sforcesca' Inf Divs
Alpine Army Corps
'Taurinense' Alpine Div
Levanna Autonomous Group (3 Alpine bns, 1 mountain arty bn), 3rd Alpini Regt
Army Reserve
'Legnano', 'Brennero' Inf Divs
'Tridentina' Alpine Div
4th Bersaglieri Regt, 1st Armd Regt, 'Nizza' Cav Regt



Marshal Badoglio wearing the pre-war uniform in light grey *cordellino* material with black velvet collar facing. His service cap has the ranking of a Marshal of Italy – silver eagle on red backing, and four silver stripes above the broad *greca* braid of general officers. Note above his medal ribbons the crown and crossed swords badges of War Merit promotions; these came in three classes – silver, gold, and gold with red backing. Badoglio has one of the latter, meaning that he earned a War Merit promotion as a general; the others mean that he must have earned a War Merit promotion to almost every rank held during his military career. (Hulton Getty)

The Invasion of Greece

At dawn on 28 October 1940 seven Italian divisions of the 9th and 11th Armies began the invasion on four lines of advance from Albania – occupied since April 1939. They managed to get five or six miles inside Greece before becoming bogged down. They found themselves fighting larger than expected forces, who fought with great determination and had a much superior knowledge of the terrain. Italian units were often trapped in valleys while Greek forces moved through the hills and mountains to encircle them; in this way the 'Julia' Alpine Division lost 5,000 men in the Pindus Gorges.

The Greeks counter-attacked, and by 22 November had pushed the 200,000 Italians back over the border into Albania, where the fighting turned into a bloody stalemate. Large Italian reinforcements were sent to the theatre over the winter, but despite making limited gains they were unable to force the Greeks out of Albania. Both sides suffered terribly from the freezing temperatures as neither army had adequate cold weather clothing. The stalemate would probably have continued had Hitler not decided to send in German troops to break the deadlock in April 1941.

ORDER OF BATTLE
GREEK CAMPAIGN, 28 OCTOBER 1940
Epirus Sector
Ciamuria Army Corps
'Siena', 'Ferrara' Inf. Divs, 'Centauro' Armd Div
(Total – 12 inf bns, 3 Bersaglieri bns, 4 armd bns, 6 Blackshirt bns)

1940 Alpine Division Establishment

2 Alpine Inf Regts
of 3 bns
Alpine Artillery Regt
Engineer Bn
Anti-Tank Platoon

13,000 all ranks
5,400 horses/mules
162 x LMG, 66 x HMG
54 x 45mm mortars
24 x 81mm mortars
24 x 75mm pack howitzers
50 x motor vehicles
22 x m/cycles
53 x bicycles

The crew bring a 75mm M1875/1927 field gun into action in the Western Alps during the campaign against the French in June 1940. All wear M1934 greatcoats and M1933 steel helmets, and some carry M1933 gasmasks. (USSME)

'Julia' Alpine Div. (5 Alpini bns, 1 Albanian Volunteers bn)
Coastal Group
3rd Grenadier Regt, 'Aosta', 'Milano' Cav Regts
(Total – 3 Grenadier bns, 4 cav squadron groups, 2 Albanian Vols bns)
Macedonia Sector
XXVI Army Corps
'Parma' Inf Div
Army Reserve
'Piemonte' Inf Div
Yugoslavian Border
'Venezia', 'Arezzo' Inf Divs

Hitler prepared to help his ally by invading Greece from Bulgaria, and built up his forces in the Balkans while coercing other countries in the region to sign pacts with Germany. Yugoslavia's regent, Prince Paul, came under heavy pressure and threats to sign the Anti-Comitern Pact, much against the wishes of most of his government and the Yugoslav people. On 26 March 1941 a bloodless coup organised by Gen Simovic in the name of the young King Peter reversed this and moved Yugoslavia out of the pro-Axis camp. Hitler was furious at this 'betrayal', and decided to tie the invasions of Greece and Yugoslavia together to secure his southern flank before the planned invasion of the Soviet Union. On 24 February 1941 Greece accepted a British offer of reinforcements, but the British troops and RAF squadrons hastily stripped from North Africa were too few to affect the outcome. On 6 April 1941 Italian and German forces invaded Greece and Yugoslavia; facing overwhelming forces, Greece capitulated on 21 April.

The individual Italian soldier in Greece often fought with heroism, especially in defence, but the army's overall performance reflected both poor preparation and low morale. Italian soldiers felt let down and misled by their superiors, who had led them to believe that they would gain a quick and relatively easy victory. The whole corrupt nature of the Fascist government and its war machine was exposed by this campaign, in which the ordinary soldiers suffered great hardships largely due to the incompetence and unforgivably bad planning of their leaders. Italian losses were nearly 14,000 dead, 25,000 miss-ing, 115,350 sick, wounded and frostbitten, giving a total of just over 154,000 casualties.

Albanian Units in the Italian Army

The invasion of Albania in April 1939 was followed by the absorption of up to 7,000 of the 10,000 men of the former Albanian Army

Wireless operators of an artillery regiment use an RF2 type radio in a Alpine village during the fighting on the French/Italian border. The operators are wearing enlisted ranks' grey-green wool *bustina* forage caps with their M1934 greatcoats. The soldier watching has the grey-green leather two-pocket bandolier worn by the artillery and mounted troops. (USSME)

to form Albanian units of the Italian Army. One Albanian MVSN Legion was formed, along with six Royal Albanian Army Battalions, two Fortress Machine Gun Battalions, a Royal Guard Battalion and two Carabinieri Legions.

The Albanians were involved in the invasion of Greece and performed very badly, with some units even firing on their own side. Looking for scapegoats for his army's poor performance in this campaign, Mussolini attempted to pin much of the blame on the Albanian units involved. Despite this poor showing new Albanian units were organised to help fight the growing menace of Albanian Communist partisans. In June 1942 the Albanian contingent of the Italian Army consisted of four light infantry regiments of Cacciatori d'Albania ('Albanian Hunters') and 14 militia battalions.

ORDER OF BATTLE
GREEK CAMPAIGN, 6 APRIL 1941
Army Group Reserve
'Casale', 'Firenze' Inf Divs
9th Army
III Army Corps
'Venezia', 'Arezzo', 'Taro', 'Forli' Inf Divs
XXVI Army Corps
'Piemonte', 'Parma' Inf Divs, 'Tridentina' Alpine Div
11th Army
IV Army Corps
'Cacciatori delle Alpi' Inf Div, 'Pusteria' Alpine Div
VIII Army Corps
'Cagliari', 'Siena', 'Bari', 'Pinerolo' Inf Divs
XXV Army Corps
'Sforzesca', 'Ferrara', 'Modena', 'Brennero', 'Lupi di Toscana', 'Legnano' Inf Divs, 'Julia' Alpine Div
'Special' Army Corps
'Cuneo', 'Acqui' Inf Divs, 'Special' Alpine Div
Army Reserve
'Puglie' Inf Div, 'Cuneense' Alpine Div
'Centauro' Group (1 armd regt, 1 Bersaglieri bn, 1 cav regt, 1 armd arty regt)

The Invasion of Yugoslavia

The invasion of 6 April 1941 saw attacks launched from Austria, Italy, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria and Albania. Initially only Italian and German forces were involved, but from 11 April they were joined by the Hungarian 3rd Army. Italian participation was limited to the 2nd Army, which advanced southwards down the coast and inland to take the Slovenian capital Ljubljana; and the 9th Army, which came northwards from Albania and met them in the region of Dubrovnik.

With a combined force of 50-odd divisions against Yugoslavia's 28 divisions the result was a foregone conclusion, and Yugoslavia surrendered on 17 April.

Yugoslavia was divided up between the Axis powers, with Italy occupying southern Slovenia, the Dalmatian coastline, Montenegro, and adding Kosovo to Albania. Resistance to the occupying forces began almost immediately, and was to tie up large numbers of Italian troops for the remainder of the war (see pages 12–13).

ORDER OF BATTLE
YUGOSLAV CAMPAIGN, 6 APRIL 1941
2nd Army
V Army Corps
'Bergamo', 'Lombardia' Inf Divs
VI Army Corps
'Sassari', 'Friuli', 'Assietta' Inf Divs
XI Army Corps
'Re', 'Isonzo', 'Ravenna' Inf Divs
3rd Alpine Group (3 Alpini bns, 1 mountain arty bn)
Motorised Army Corps
'Pasubio', 'Torino' Inf Divs, 'Littorio' Armd Div
Celere ('Fast') Army Corps
1st 'Eugenio di Savoia', 2nd 'Emanuele Filiberto Testo di Ferro', 3rd 'Principe Amedeo Duca d'Aosta' Celere Divs

Fiume Fortress Police and Frontier Guard units

1940 Fast ('Celere') Division Establishment

2 Cavalry Regts
of 4 sqns + MG Sqn
Bersaglieri Regt
of 3 bns
Artillery Regt
Light Tank Group
AT Coy
Bersaglieri M/Cycle Coy
Engineer Coy

7,750 all ranks
2,012 horses
165 x LMG, 78 x HMG
8 x 20mm AA, 8 x 47mm AT
24 x other artillery
61 x tanks
641 x motor vehicles
431 x m/cycles, 2,565 bicycles

A long column of Italian infantry wind their way slowly forward on the Mediterranean coast in June 1940. Most wear the lightweight fatigues, and some the old M1935 zip-up flannel shirt. (James Burd)

Prince Umberto (left), heir to the throne and commander of the forces which invaded France, confers with his generals during the five-day campaign. He is wearing an officer's *bustina* made of pale gabardine and an officer's wool greatcoat; both display his ranking of *generale designato d'armata* (see chart on page 41). At right foreground is a divisional general. (USSME)

Zara Command Area
3 MG bns, 1 Bersaglieri bn, 1 HQ Arty bn, 1 Engineer bn, 1 armd coy, 1 Blackshirts coy, Royal Finance Guard, Royal Carabineers, Royal Naval units

Albanian Armed Forces Command

9th Army
III Army Corps – omitted
XXVI Army Corps – omitted
'Librazhd' Sector
'Arezzo ', 'Firenze', 'Pinerolo' Inf Divs
'Cuneense' Alpine Div
XIV Army Corps
'Puglie', 'Firenze'(from 14.4.41) Inf Divs
XVII Army Corps
'Messina', 'Marche' Inf Divs, 'Centauro' Armd Div

The Russian Front

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941 Mussolini immediately offered to send troops to help his ally. The offer of a corps-size force was accepted, and the 'Corpo Spedzione Italiane in Russia' or CSIR was assembled under the command of LtGen Giovanni Messe. The corps had a strength of 62,000 men, with two (nominally) motorised infantry divisions of the old 1938 binary type – 'Pasubio' and 'Torino'; and a Celere ('fast' – i.e. cavalry) division, 'Principe Amadeo Duca d'Aosta ', which comprised two horsed cavalry regiments, a Bersaglieri cyclist battalion, an artillery regiment, and a light tank group. Various support, service and specialist units were added to the strength of the CSIR, and it was – by Italian standards – quite well equipped.

The CSIR was sent to the southern sector of the German advance in the Ukraine in July 1941, and in its early encounters was successful, taking a number of towns and cities and creating a favourable impression on its German allies. Even though the CSIR enjoyed high priority in the issue of the best available weapons and other hardware, these were not in fact adequate: the regiments were motorised only in theory, the artillery was of First World War vintage, the armoured units still had the useless tankettes, and anti-tank weapons were inadequate. As the Germans discovered late in 1941, on the Russian Front even well-equipped units soon exhausted their supplies and suffered breakdowns and combat losses, and nothing was easy or quick to replace. The sheer scale of the fighting and the distances involved meant that an army with only just enough of everything to go around was soon in trouble.

Mussolini was determined to increase his contribution to the Russian campaign, and thus his credibility as an Axis partner. Despite the hardships suffered by the CSIR during winter 1941/42, and despite objections from Gen Messe, in March 1942 he sent a further seven divisions East; the new organisation took the title of 8th Army, comprising II and XXXV Army Corps. By August the Italians had advanced to the Don with Army Group B (a command of 53 divisions divided between 4th Panzer Army, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 6th Rumanian Armies, 2nd Hungarian and 8th Italian Armies).

The 8th Army was on the Chir river north-west of Stalingrad in November 1942 when the great Soviet pincer movement – Operation Uranus – was launched to cut off the German forces in and around the enbattled city. The much better equipped, adapted, and motivated Red Army concentrated their firepower against those sectors of the Axis front held by Germany's weaker allies – initially the Rumanians, whom they broke through, with some difficulty, to link up on 23 November. Just after Von Manstein unleashed his doomed Operation Winter Storm to break through to Stalingrad from the south-west, the tanks of Vatutin's South-West Front and the Voronezh Front smashed through the Italian sector; the Alpine Corps was cut off, and the 8th Army was effectively destroyed as a fighting command. In January 1943 the survivors regrouped in the Ukraine, and by March most had begun to return to Italy, leaving a small number of Italian units behind to help fight partisans.

The 8th Army's losses in men and equipment were disastrous. Out of an army of 229,000 men, 85,000 were killed or missing and 30,000 were wounded. Losses in artillery were equally devastating, with 1,200 guns out of a total of 1,340 being destroyed or abandoned. Motor vehicles were always in short supply in the Italian Army, and the 18,200 lost in Russia out a total of 22,000 were simply irreplaceable.

Although the Italian Army's losses on the Russian Front were grievous, by the huge scale of the fighting in the East they were not significant. Strategists would probably argue that if the same number of men and – more importantly – the same scale of equipment had been sent in 1941 to North Africa instead, they might have tipped the balance there in favour of the Axis forces.

Heavily burdened Alpini of the 'Verona' Bn, 'Tridentina' Div trudge through a muddy valley during the advance into Greece in October 1940. The man at far right wears a M1909 grey-green wool cape, which the soldier in front of him has slung his over his shoulder. (Rex Trye)

ORDER OF BATTLE
8th ARMY, RUSSIA, 1942

II Army Corps
'Sforzesca', 'Ravenna', 'Cosseria' Inf Divs
XXXV Army Corps
'Pasubio', 'Torino' Motorised Divs
3rd 'Principe Amedeo Duca d'Aosta' Celere Div
Alpine Corps
'Tridentina', 'Julia', 'Cuneense' Alpine Divs
'Vincenza' Occupation Inf Div

The Croatian Legion

The Italians decided to form a Croatian Legion to fight on the Russian Front, in imitation of their German allies – the Wehrmacht already had one in the form of the 369th Infantry Regiment. Using men from the

Replacement Battalion of the 369th, a Legion of 1,211 officers and men was formed (45 officers, 70 NCOs, 1,100 men and 108 horses). Given the title 'Legione Croata Autotransportable' or Motorised Croatian Legion, the unit arrived in Russia in April 1942. After acquitting itself well during the rest of the year the Legion was largely destroyed along with the rest of the 8th Army in December 1942. Attempts to raise a second legion in May 1943 seem to have come to nothing.

OCCUPATION DUTIES

Apart from the over 250,000 men of the 8th Army fighting in Russia the main role of the Italian Army in Europe after April 1941 was as occupation troops. No less than 36 divisions were deployed in the Balkans (Yugoslavia, Albania, Greece and the various Greek islands) and in southern France and the French island of Corsica. The Italian Army encountered resistance to their occupation in all these regions to some extent, and suffered a large number of casualties from the attacks of partisans and resistance fighters. For instance, in the first five months of 1943 alone the Italian occupation forces suffered over 10,500 casualties.

Alpine artillerymen disembark in Albania on their way to the Greek front. All wear the M1937 tunic with black collar facings piped with the orange-yellow of the artillery, and bearing the double green flames of the Alpini. At right note the pointed cuffs, a distinctive feature of the M1937 tunic. The central man carries the Alpine M1939 rucksack. (James Burd)

The Occupation of Yugoslavia

The Axis forces carved up Yugoslavia between them, with Italy gaining Montenegro, western Slovenia and the coastline of Dalmatia. Western Macedonia and Kosovo were handed over to Albania, which had been part of the Italian 'empire' since April 1939.

Resistance to the Italian occupation came from two quarters: from the Communist Partisans led by Josip Broz Tito, and the Serbian Royalist 'Chetnik' Movement led by Col Mihailovic of the former Yugoslav Army. Fierce resistance to the Italians flared up in Montenegro as early as July 1941, and continued with varying intensity throughout the Italian-occupied areas, tying down large numbers of troops (see MAA 142, *Partisan Warfare 1941-45* for a more detailed account). In July 1943 there were a total of 14 infantry divisions on occupation duties in various parts of Yugoslavia as well as a large number of support and auxiliary units such as the Frontier and Finance Guards.

To help counter guerrilla actions by the Partisans and the Chetniks the Italians raised local Yugoslav auxiliary forces from 1942. The 'Milizia Volontaria Anti-Comunista' or MVAC were motivated by a desire to fight the Communist Partisans. The violent mutual opposition of the Partisans and Chetniks saw them spend as much time fighting each other as they did the Axis occupation forces; and the occupiers were not slow to encourage this. Chetnik hatred of the Partisans led to some Montenegrin Chetniks fighting for a time under the banner of the MVAC. MVAC units were raised on a local basis by the Italian divisions deployed in particular areas, and were usually recruited along ethnic lines: Catholics, Greek Orthodox and Moslems had their own, usually strictly segregated units. Accurate strengths of the number of MVAC forces are hard to find, but we do know that in March 1943 there were 30,000 volunteers. These can be broken down into 8,000-9,000 Catholics, 7,000-8,000 Moslems and 15,000 Orthodox (the latter being mostly Chetniks).

ORDER OF BATTLE
ITALIAN OCCUPATION ARMY IN THE BALKANS, 25 JULY 1943

ALBANIA
9th Army
IV Army Corps
'Brennero', 'Parma', 'Perugia' Inf Divs
XXV Army Corps
'Arezzo ', 'Firenze' Inf Divs
Army Reserve
'Puglie' Inf Div

HERZEGOVINA
VI Army Corps
'Marche', 'Messina'
Inf Divs
XXVIII Coastal Bde

MONTENEGRO
XIV Army Corps
'Emilia', 'Ferrara',
'Venezia' Inf Divs,
'Taurinense' Alpine Div

CROATIA-SLOVENIA
2nd Army
V Army Corps
'Macerata', 'Murge',
'Re' Inf Divs,
XIV Coastal Bde
XI Army Corps
'Cacciatori delle Alpi',
'Isonzo', 'Lombardia'
Inf Divs
XVIII Army Corps
'Bergamo', 'Zara' Inf Divs,
XVII Coastal Bde
Army Reserve
1st Celere Div

GREECE
11th Army
III Army Corps
'Forli', 'Pinerolo' Inf Divs

The crew of an 8mm M1935 Fiat Revelli machine gun from the 30th Artillery Regt, 'Lupi di Toscana' Inf Div defend their gun line on the Greek front in winter 1940/41. The stencilled branch of service badge with regimental number is just visible on the front of the left hand man's M1933 helmet; all wear the M1934 greatcoat and knitted balaclavas; the right hand man also has a roll-neck sweater. The M1935 Revelli was an up-dated – but not improved – version of the M1914; known to its crews as the 'knuckle-buster', it was awkward to handle, required lubrication of the ammunition to function properly, and was prone to 'cook off' chambered rounds during pauses in firing. It also contributed yet another calibre of small arms ammunition to the army's monstrous logistic requirements – 6.5mm, 7.35mm, 8mm, 9mm, 10.35mm ... (R.Tomasi)

VIII Army Corps
'Cagliari', 'Piemonte' Inf Divs
XXVI Army Corps
'Modena', 'Casale', 'Acqui' Inf Divs
CRETE – 'Siena' Inf Div, 51st Special Bde
AEGEAN SEA – 'Cuneo', 'Regina' Inf Divs

THE CONTINENTAL UNIFORM OF THE ITALIAN ARMY 1940-43

The basic uniform worn by the Italian soldier from 1940 to 1943 saw only a few minor changes during this period. An ordinary soldier of 1943 would to most observers appear exactly the same as he had when Italy entered the war in June 1940. The uniform of 1940 was a mixture of old and new styles, with the stylish and up-to-date steel helmet introduced in 1933 being worn with the pantaloon trousers – i.e. reaching below the knee and worn with long puttees – that had been long abandoned by most other European armies.

In 1940 the 'continental' uniform worn by the ordinary soldier in the European theatre consisted of a *bustina* cap; a grey-green wool tunic of M1937 pattern with open collar; a grey-green cotton shirt and tie; grey-green wool pantaloons worn with wool puttees; and dyed black leather M1912 boots. The M1934 grey-green wool or man-made fibre single-breasted greatcoat completed the outfit, together with the M1933 steel helmet.

It should be emphasised that the various uniform regulations were often not applied rigidly and all ranks, but especially officers, were given a great deal of leeway. When new items of uniform were issued the soldier could wear the old item until it wore out or adapt it, e.g. by removing the black collar facing of the M1937 tunic and replacing it with grey-green. Officers were particularly prone to keeping favourite items of uniform long after official regulations had declared them obsolete. The continued appearance of the M1937 tunic in photographs right up to 1945 is testimony to this fact.

The appearance of uniforms in actual service might also vary widely due to relative degrees of wear. For instance, jackets were not cleaned very often while trousers were washed once a fortnight, so the trousers tended to be a lighter shade than the jacket.

A gunner wearing the M1937 tunic reads a letter from home. Here the black helmet stencil of the Divisional Artillery is sharp; although almost universally applied, these branch badges are often unclear in photographs due to both wear and reflection. (Robert Stedman Collection)

Troops' tunics
Models 1933,1937,1939,1940 & 1942

The look of the Italian soldier changed dramatically with the introduction of the M1933 tunic, replacing the M1909 high-collared jacket with a open-collared model worn with shirt and tie. Open-collared jackets had been worn since the First World War by the elite Arditi assault commandos, and it was on this corps' uniform that the new design was modelled. The collar of the M1933 had black cloth facing the top half with the divisional collar patch or *mostrine* sewn to it. Some units had brightly coloured cloth collar facings in branch colours or, as in the case of the cavalry, a different colour for each regiment.

The M1937 tunic differed only slightly from the M1933 in that it had an integral, adjustable cloth belt fastened with a metal clasp. In 1939 a new tunic for NCOs was introduced, but this was little different from the M1933 and M1937 except that it was made from a higher grade of cloth and had a buckle copied from the type in use on the Air Force tunic.

All these models of tunic had three front buttons for other ranks, and two breast and two skirt pockets of pleated patch type with single-button three-point flaps. These early models also had a hidden pocket at the back which was formed by the rear flap; this so-called 'bread' pocket was used to carry personal effects where the soldier could easily get at them.

The next major change came with the introduction of the M1940 tunic, which replaced the black collar with a plain grey-green one; *mostrine* were still worn. A new adjustable belt had two buttons on the front instead of the metal clasp of the M1937.

The M1942 tunic differed little from the M1940; due to wartime shortages the design was simplified and inferior material was used in its manufacture, with canvas employed for the lining.

Mussolini visits XXVI Army Corps of the 9th Army on the Greek front in early 1941. He is wearing the uniform of First Marshal of the Empire, a rank held only by himself and the king. The officer obscured by the telescope is a divisional general of Alpini. The group at Mussolini's shoulder all appear to be captains; the two men at the right are generals of infantry and Blackshirts respectively. (USSME)

Officers' tunics

Officers' tunics were of the same basic design as the other ranks' but were better made from superior material. At the beginning of the war most were made from a gabardine material called *'cordellino'*. This appears in photographs lighter than the grey-green uniform, and was often a strikingly light grey. In wartime service many officers wore woollen tunics similar to the other ranks' model, but still well-tailored and from a better grade of material. Officers' tunics had four front buttons instead of the other ranks' three.

Legwear

The usual pattern of trousers were grey-green wool (or wool and synthetic mix) pantaloons, which reached to just below the knee where they fastened with a button. The bottoms of the pantaloons were covered by the tops of woollen puttees, which were tied around with tapes or were partly covered with pulled-up woollen socks. These archaic-looking trousers were worn in various states of bagginess, and often looked very ungainly indeed. Mounted, motorised and some artillery troops wore a type of wool breeches, flared in the thigh and longer in the leg.

Officers usually wore breeches made of *cordellino* gabardine material, with two black stripes down the sides flanking a central piping in branch colour, e.g. orange-yellow for artillery. More practical (and cheaper) in the field were breeches made from a good quality wool material, or even pantaloons, again made from better qualitry wool.

The basic leg protection worn by the vast majority of the Italian Army were grey-green wool puttees. These had been worn since the earliest days of the Italian Army, but the type in use during the Second World

War were introduced in 1929. Their unpopularity lay in the fact that they were difficult to put on and, although fastened with cloth tapes, often came undone in combat.

Stiff black leather gaiters were worn by mounted units (either on horseback or on motorcycles), artillery, armoured and transport units. Another more stylish model of leather leggings was worn by cavalry other ranks and NCOs; this fastened with a long leather strap wrapped around the leg and buckled three-quarters the way up the calf.

The basic other ranks' boots were usually the M1912 black leather hobnailed model; these were often made of inferior materials (they were described as being made of 'cardboard') which disintegrated in the rain and mud of Albania, Greece and Russia. Officers in Europe wore either high-topped leather riding boots, or a better-made version of the ankle boot worn in the field with socks or even puttees.

TUNIC INSIGNIA

Collar patches

Each infantry division had its own unique collar patch which was worn on the upper part of the collar (see Table A on pages 38–39 for designs and colours). The patch was rectangular and in 1940 usually measured 60mm x 32mm; as the war progressed they were gradually reduced in size. The only exceptions to the standard infantry patches were the two Grenadier Divisions, the 'Savoia' and 'Sardegna', which wore patches measuring 97mm x 28mm with lace bars. All collar patches had a white metal star fixed to the lower centre of the insignia – the emblem of the Savoyard royal dynasty.

Branches other than the infantry wore collar patches called 'flames', with the upper end shaped into one, two or three points. The **cavalry** had three-pointed flames, some of plain colours and some piped:

1st 'Nizza' Cavalry Regt– *Crimson flame*
2nd 'Piemonte Reale'Cavalry Regt – *Red flame/black piping*
3rd 'Savoia' Cavalry Regt – *Black flame*
4th 'Genova' Cavalry Regt – *Yellow flame*
5th 'Novara' Lancer Regt – *White flame*
6th 'Aosta' Lancer Regt – *Red flame*
7th 'Milano' Lancer Regt – *Crimson flame/ black piping*
9th 'Firenze' Lancer Regt – *Orange flame/ black piping*

A driver emerges from the side hatch of his M13/40 medium tank on the Greek front in March 1941. Over his blue linen one-piece overalls he wears the issue black leather coat and crash helmet. He has a mounted troops' grey-green leather bandolier slung over his left shoulder; this usually had a holstered pistol attached to the end. (USSME)

10th 'Vittorio Emanuele II' Lancer Regt – *Yellow flame/black piping*
12th 'Saluzzo' Light Cavalry Regt – *Black flame backed yellow*
13th 'Monferatto' Light Cavalry Regt – *Crimson flame backed black* 14th 'Alessandro' Light Cavalry Regt – *Orange flame backed black*
19th 'Guide' Light Cavalry Regiment – *White flame backed light blue* 30th 'Palermo' Light Cavalry Regt – *Red flame backed yellow*

Support branches of the Army wore single-pointed flames. When they were assigned to an infantry division the flame was superimposed over the lower part of the divisional patch, so that the divisional colours showed above the flame.

Other branch collar patches on M1940 uniform:

Alpini – *Double green flames*
Bersaglieri – *Double crimson flames*
Artillery – *Single black flame piped orange-yellow*
Divisional artillery – *Single black flame piped orange-yellow, over divisional atch.*
Alpine artillery – *Single black flame piped orange-yellow, over green rectangle*
Engineers – *Single black flame piped crimson*
Tanks – *Double scarlet flames on blue rectangle*
Light Tanks – *Double white flames on blue rectangle*
Motor Transport – *Double black flames on blue rectangle*
Medical Corps – *Single maroon flame*
Veterinary Corps – *Single light blue flame*
Supply Corps – *Single dark blue flame*
Commissary Corps – *Single purple flame*
Administration Corps – *Single black flame piped blue*
Stationary Reserve Units – *Single scarlet flame*
Mobile Reserve Units – *Single orange flame*

A unit of Bersaglieri, with their famous cockerel feather plumes attached to the right side of their helmets, enter the Dalmatian city of Dubrovnik during the invasion of Yugoslavia. The crimson flames collar patch can be seen on the tunics of the officers at the head of the column; the one on the left wears a grey-green turtle-neck sweater in place of shirt and tie. (USSME)

Divisional arm shields

When new divisions were formed in the mid-1930s they were each given an arm shield on the left sleeve of the tunic just above the rank insignia. These were made at first from tin and later of cloth. The shield-shaped coloured backgrounds were blue for infantry and cavalry divisions, red for motorised and green for Alpine. They bore a gold/yellow upright central sword with the divisional number beneath it and the title flanking it: e.g. 'DIVISIONE ALPINA/III/JULIA'. These arm shields

were officially withdrawn from use with the introduction of the M1940 tunic, but examples were still seen worn for a while thereafter.

Rank insignia

Ranks were shown up to 1937 on the tunic by the wearing of curved chevrons point upwards on the forearm just above the cuff. The chevrons were black up to the rank of *caporale maggiore* and gold for *sergente* and *sergente maggiore*. The rank chevrons were then moved to the upper sleeve and became shorter, arrow-shaped and point downwards. For a short period in 1937-39 the colours up to *caporale maggiore* became red while the others remained gold. From 1940 onwards the chevrons became smaller still, and those for ranks above *caporale maggiore* changed from gold to yellow. (See chart and notes on page 41 for fuller details.)

Officers' rank insignia

Warrant officers or *marescialli* wore their rank on shoulder boards, and commissioned ranks on the tunic forearms. From acting 2nd lieutenant up to colonel these were in the form of different designs in gold braid. General officers from brigadier to 'first marshal of the empire' wore intricate embroidered classical decorations called *greca* on the cuffs. (Again, see chart and notes on page 41.)

Italian infantry move through the empty streets of Ljubljana in Slovenia during the invasion of Yugoslavia. All wear standard wool uniform, greatcoats and personal equipment. (USSME)

A motorcyclist pauses during the advance into Yugoslavia; his greatcoat is the M1934 model issued to mounted troops, with a larger shawl collar, bigger chest pockets and more flared skirts to allow for riding. His machine is a Moto Guzzi GT17 solo with the Breda 30 light machine gun mounted on the handlebars – a combination in widespread use. (Modern History Museum, Llubjiana)

HEADGEAR

The bustina

The field cap worn almost universally by the Italian Army was the very popular *bustina*. This was a sidecap with a front visor/flap which was usually worn folded up, and ear/neck flaps which were generally fastened together over the crown by means of a button. The *bustina* was made of the same grey-green wool or wool and synthetic mixture as the rest of the uniform, varying slightly in both quality of cloth and design. Branch of service cap badges for other ranks, generally of black rayon sewn on to a grey-green wool backing, were worn on the front flap.

Officers' caps, of the same design as other ranks', were initially made from *cordellino* garbadine but later from wool; the side flaps were fastened with press studs instead of a button. Their cap badges were made of gold wire on a grey or grey-green backing depending on the cap material. A branch of service badge was worn on the front flap; and, set slantwise on the left front of the crown, a rank badge as follows:

Aspirante ufficiale – gold star with black centre
Sottotenante – gold star
Tenente – two gold stars
Primo tenente – two gold stars with gold bar
Capitano – three gold stars
Primo capitano – three gold stars with gold bar
(Ranks from *maggiore* to *colonello* were mounted in a rectangular gold frame:)
Maggiore – one gold star
Tenente colonnello – two gold stars

Summer 1941: a column of cheerful Italian infantry of the CSIR march towards the front in Russia. The officer and his NCO are wearing the M1940 wool uniform, with the officer wearing lighter coloured breeches. The rest of the soldiers wear the medium grey fatigue uniform as summer field dress; note the contrast between the two shades. Their personal equipment is standard issue, with the M1935 cylindrical gasmask bag much in evidence. (USSME)

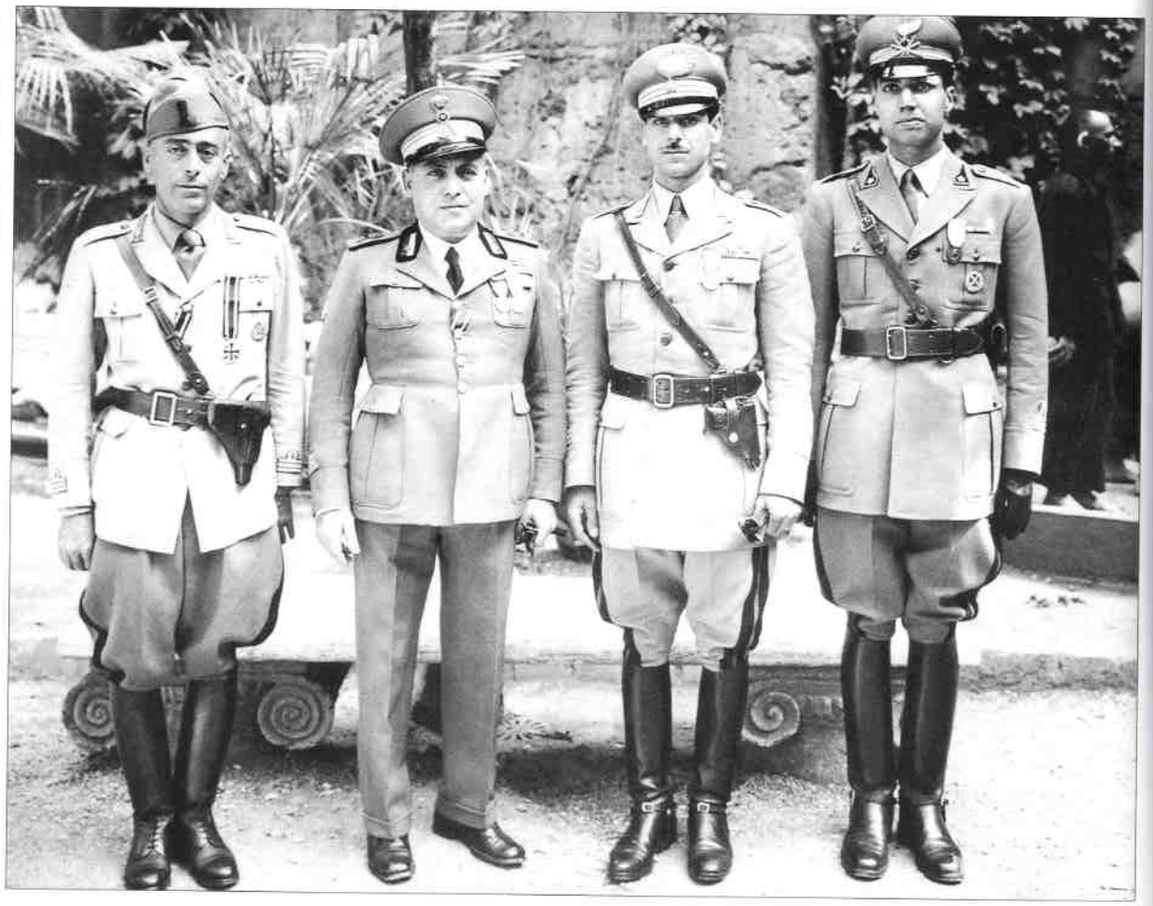
Colonnello – three gold stars
(All insignia for general officers were mounted on red backgrounds, all apart from 'first marshal of the empire' mounted in a rectangular red frame:)
Generale di brigata – one gold star
Generale di divisione – two gold stars
Generale di corpo d'armata – two gold stars flanking gold crown
Generale designato d'armata – two gold stars flanking gold crown and sceptre
Generale d'armata – three gold stars
Maresciallo d'Italia – four gold stars
Primo maresciallo dell'Impero – gold eagle clutching fasces

Officers' peaked service caps

With the introduction of the 1933 uniform a new type of peaked service cap for officers replaced the stiff kepi worn since 1909. The cap was made of various materials, the colour varying from mouse-grey to the usual grey-green with a blueish tint. The cap had a black leather peak and chinstrap. The crown was at first quite low, but later became higher at the front and acquired a Germanic appearance. Cap badges were usually made of gold wire for the Army and silver for the MVSN. Ranks

BELOW **(Left) An infantry captain poses proudly for the cameras after receiving the Iron Cross 2nd Class at an award ceremony. He wears an officer's pale *bustina* and a M1933 white summer tunic, with the yellow and blue collar patches of the 'Torino' Division. He has M1940 yellow cuff ranking fixed to his old tunic, and already wears a German ribbon in his buttonhole – presumably the War Merit Cross. The Italian award on his breast pocket is the silver CSIR Fronte Russo badge. (Second left) An infantry lieutenant-colonel of the 'Sassari' or 'Macerata' Division on occupation duties in Yugoslavia, wearing M1934 service cap and tunic and Iron Cross 2nd Class ribbon. (Second right) A Carabinieri**

(continued opposite)



(continued from page 20)

officer wears the M1934 service cap with a white summer tunic. (Right) A major of a horse artillery regiment has just received an Italian medal. He wears a fine-quality, pale, private-purchase service uniform of M1940 cut. The artillery collar patches are a single black flame piped with orange-yellow; the CSIR silver breast badge shows clearer in this image. (Vitetti Archive)daf

A German general presents an Iron Cross to a Italian colonel of the 'Torino' Division in Russia. The recipient is wearing a darker than usual wool *bustina* with his standard grey-green wool M1940 uniform. Behind the two officers a divisional general already displaying the Knight's Cross and Iron Cross 1st Class is wearing a lighter grey *cordellino* tunic and cap, allowing comparison of the shades. (Robert Stedman Collection)

were indicated by a series of bands around the base; these 'tapes' were 10mm deep, and were made of gold braid following the same rank sequence as that used in the cuff rank insignia – e.g. three thin bands for *capitano*, two thin above one thick for *tenente colonello* (see chart on page 41). The bands were divided by thin piping, generally of the same material as the cap but in service branches made in the branch colour, e.g. light blue for the Veterinary Corps. General officers from the rank of brigadier upwards had a silver band of the same *greca* embroidery as used on the cuffs, with a series of plain silver bands above, according to rank.

Alpini headgear

The Alpini wore a special grey-green brimmed felt hat; on the left side was a pom-pon or boss covering the mount for a feather. For other ranks this was coloured in battalion sequence – white for 1st Bn, red for 2nd, green for 3rd and blue for 4th Battalion. For officers the boss was gold and for generals silver. Ranks were also shown by the kind of feather worn: a crow's feather for other ranks and NCOs, an eagle feather for officers and a goose feather for generals. The Alpini were very proud of their traditions and particularly cherished the felt hat – so much so that officers who had served in the Alpini at any time previously during their career would often unofficially continue to wear it. Alpini officers' ranks were worn on the left side of the hat behind the feather in the form of inverted gold braid chevrons in the usual sequence, e.g. two thin chevrons for *tenente*, one thin over one thick for *maggiore*, etc. General officers had a silver lace rhomboidal box in the same place, with one and two stars in the centre for brigade and divisional generals respectively.

Steel helmets

The standard steel helmet used by the Italian Army throughout the period was the M1933 which was introduced in that year. This was painted grey-green; until 1942 it usually had a black stencilled branch of service badge on the front with the number of the unit in the centre. During the early campaigns the old M1916 'Adrian' helmet was still in use with some units such as Anti-Aircraft troops, the Sanitary Corps and 'Blackshirts' units. Coastal divisions formed in 1939-43 to defend the coastline of Italy were second-line units and many of these troops seem also to have worn the Adrian helmet.

One interesting footnote is that photographs of the fighting with France in the Western Alps in June 1940 show some soldiers of the 'Cosseria' Infantry Division wearing the Czechoslovakian M1934 helmet. It is not known why the Italian Army should be wearing these helmets at that time or from what source they came; the only logical explanation is that they were supplied by the Germans from stocks acquired following the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1939.

PROTECTIVE CLOTHING

Greatcoats

The standard infantry greatcoat throughout the war was the M1934 single-breasted pattern, which was made from a coarse wool cloth or a synthetic material called 'Lanital'. Coats made from the latter were said to have been virtually useless, as the material had no warmth-giving properties at all. The greatcoat had two side pockets with flaps, and two slash chest pockets which could be used for warming the hands; the five front buttons were covered with a fly flap, and the coat had plain shoulder straps. Insignia on the greatcoat were usually limited to white metal national stars on the collar and rank chevrons on the upper sleeve. The mounted troops' version had a broader shawl collar and more generously cut skirts.

A warmer, padded, double-breasted version with a removable cloth lining also existed, but it is not known if these were general issue or were acquired only by the lucky few. A double-breasted fleece-lined coat is also seen in photos of CSIR officers. The standard officers' greatcoat was double-breasted and made from high quality woollen cloth, sometimes of a noticeably lighter grey; it had two rows of three front buttons, and no shoulder straps. Silver stars were worn on the points of the large collar, and rank insignia on the forearms.

Other types of officers' coats seen in use included a very popular double-breasted 'windcheater' type (see Plate C3). It was made from hard-wearing brown canvas with a canvas belt and brown leather shoulder patches. A dark brown or black leather double-breasted coat was also seen but was not in widespread use; this was of the same style as the leather coats issued to tank crews (see Plate D1) and may have been purchased privately by individuals. As in every army, officers always had the option of buying better equipment than their standard pattern, and this was particularly true when it came to coats.

In this posed photograph a captain hands over mail from home to one of his men. Two types of fleece hat are being worn: the officer has the pattern issued mostly to the Alpini in Russia, and the soldier the *'ciacula'* acquired in Rumania. The private is also wearing the padded version of the M1934 greatcoat, which is double-breasted and has a removable lining. His bandolier has a Bersaglieri-type ammunition pouch attached to the end, suggesting that he belongs to that corps. (Robert Stedman Collection)

Two Alpini of the 'Monte Cervino' Ski Bn in Russia dragging kit on a sledge. Both wear the two-piece white camouflage suit, issued mainly to the Alpini; unusually they are not wearing the white helmet cover; note the black stencilled Alpini badge on the grey-green paint finish, and also the crow's feather rising from its boss on the left side – this was attached by a wire clip which passed under the helmet rim. Unique to this corps' equipment are the four whitened canvas pouches on the belt. (USSME)

Mention should also be made of the grey-green woollen cape worn by the rank and file, especially during the early part of the war. This was a knee-length poncho with a large collar which fastened at the neck. Although of archaic appearance the cape did give badly needed extra protection when wearing the poor-quality greatcoat, and was popular with troops such as the Alpini who faced colder conditions. The main pattern of cape in use was the M1907, and although a later type was introduced it was essentially the same as the earlier model.

Soldiers from the 'Monte Cervino' Bn wearing the helmet cover, with the feather attached. Note the wrist and ankle straps of the two-piece snow suit, and at left the rear detail of the four-pouch ammunition belt. See also Plate F3. (Marco Novarese)

Winter clothing

The Italian Army was sent to fight in Russia with little special equipment or clothing suitable for the severe conditions that they would encounter there – Italian uniforms had not even been adequate for the fighting in Greece in the winter of 1940/41. As the CSIR were transported through Eastern Europe by train their commander, Gen Messe, took matters into his own hands. While in Rumania he bought a large number of fleece hats to issue to the troops – locally called *ciacula*, these were commonly worn by the Rumanian population. Another type of fleece-lined hat

An infantry officer on the Eastern Front wears the type of fleece cap generally seen in use by the Alpini; typically, he has the branch/regiment badge from a *bustina* sewn to the front flap. The greatcoat is double-breasted with a deep collar, and fleece lining can be seen at the open neck. (Franco Mesturini Archives)

worn by the Italians resembled the Soviet pattern, with ear flaps which could be worn up or down. This type was issued to the Alpini in quite large numbers, and often had a *bustina* badge sewn to the front.

In snowy conditions two types of white two-piece coveralls were apparently used in Russia. The first had been developed before the war and issued to various units; it may have been one-piece, but details are eluisive. The second type was a two-piece suit with a drawstring-fastened collar and wrist straps on the jacket and ankle straps on the loose-fitting trousers. This new type seems to have been issued to the Alpini only, and perhaps only to a few select units such as the 'Monte Cervino' Ski Battalion (see Plate F3). Priority in the issue of these suits seems always to have been enjoyed firstly by the Alpini, and then by the Bersaglieri, as these are the troops usually seen wearing them.

White canvas helmet covers were worn with the white coveralls, and sometimes with the grey-green uniform. Suprisingly, the Alpini still wore their coloured pom-pon and feather on the white helmet cover, which must have rather defeated the object of the camouflage. Some Alpini were even seen to wear their famous felt hats, with the brim pulled down at the back to give a little extra protection from the cold. Lucky soldiers might also receive a lambswool surcoat to be worn with the white coveralls; again, these were largely issued to a few elite units.

Apart from the coveralls loose-fitting white hooded capes were also worn. The Alpini had a so-called *'camisasccio'*, so baggy that it was usually worn over the top of the uniform, helmet and equipment for guard duty.

Footwear still largely consisted of the standard hobnailed boot, which was of little use in extreme cold and caused large numbers of frostbite casualties. Requests from the army in Russia for felt boots like the Soviet *valeiki* fell on deaf ears; like the other armies on the Russian Front the Italians wore improvised footwear to try to protect their feet, though some soldiers were issued with canvas overboots which helped greatly.

Special winter clothing of all types was always in short supply and the majority of soldiers on the Russian Front had to make do with the basic uniform with the addition of wool gloves, scarves and balaclavas.

Chemical and burn protection

Special protective clothing was worn by specialist troops, and included a grey asbestos suit which was supposed to be worn by flame-thrower operators. The jacket was double-breasted, the right side being pulled across the chest and fastening level with the left arm. Both the collar and cuffs fastened tightly with buttons, and when worn with the loose-fitting trousers and a hood gave overall protection to the body. The hood seems to have come in two types: one incorporated goggles, and the other left the face exposed and was worn with a gasmask without the canister fitted. Although the suit must have been very hot and uncomfortable it was worn even in the extreme heat of North Africa. However, photographic evidence indicates that many flame-thrower operators went into action with no protective gear at all – whether by choice or by necessity is not known.

The development of chemical warfare had been given a great deal of emphasis in the pre-war years. The Italians had used gas in both their conquest of Ethiopia and the suppression of rebellion in Libya in the 1930s. Chemical troops were issued with rubberised coveralls similar to

WESTERN ALPS, 1940
1: Gunner, 59th Artillery Regt, 'Cagliari ' Inf Div
2: Caporale, 89th Infantry Regt, 'Cosseria' Inf Div
3: Sergente, 'Val d'Orco' Bn,
4th Alpine Regt, 'Taurinense' Alpine Div

1 2 3

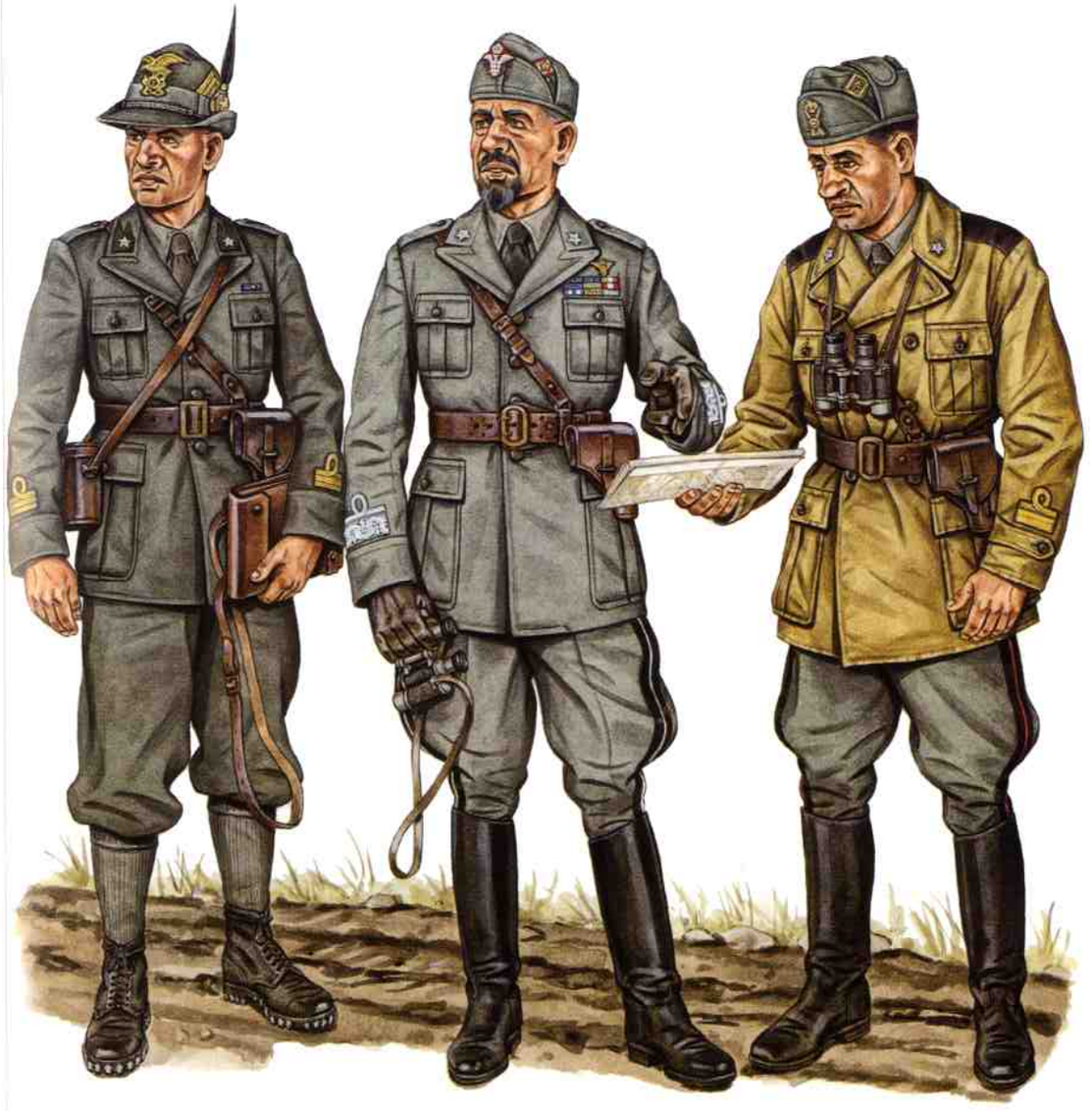
GREECE, 1940-41

1: Caporale, 31st Inf Regt, 'Siena' Inf Div
2: Soldato, 77th Inf Regt, 'Lupi di Toscana' Inf Div
3: Camicia nera, 1st Albanian Legion MVSN, 1941

1 2 3

GREECE, 1940-41

1: Capitano, 'Edolo' Alpine Bn, 5th Alpine Regt, 'Tridentina' Alpine Div
2: Generale di brigata, Army Headquarters, 1940
3: Maggiore, 54th Inf Regt, 'Sforzesca' Inf Div, 1941



1 2 3

YUGOSLAVIA, 1941

1: Tenente, 'Centauro' Armoured Div

2: Sergente, 3rd Motorcycle Coy, 3rd Bersaglieri Regt, 3rd Celere Div 'Principe Amedeo Duca d'Aosta'

3: Caporale maggiore, 23rd Sector, Frontier Guards

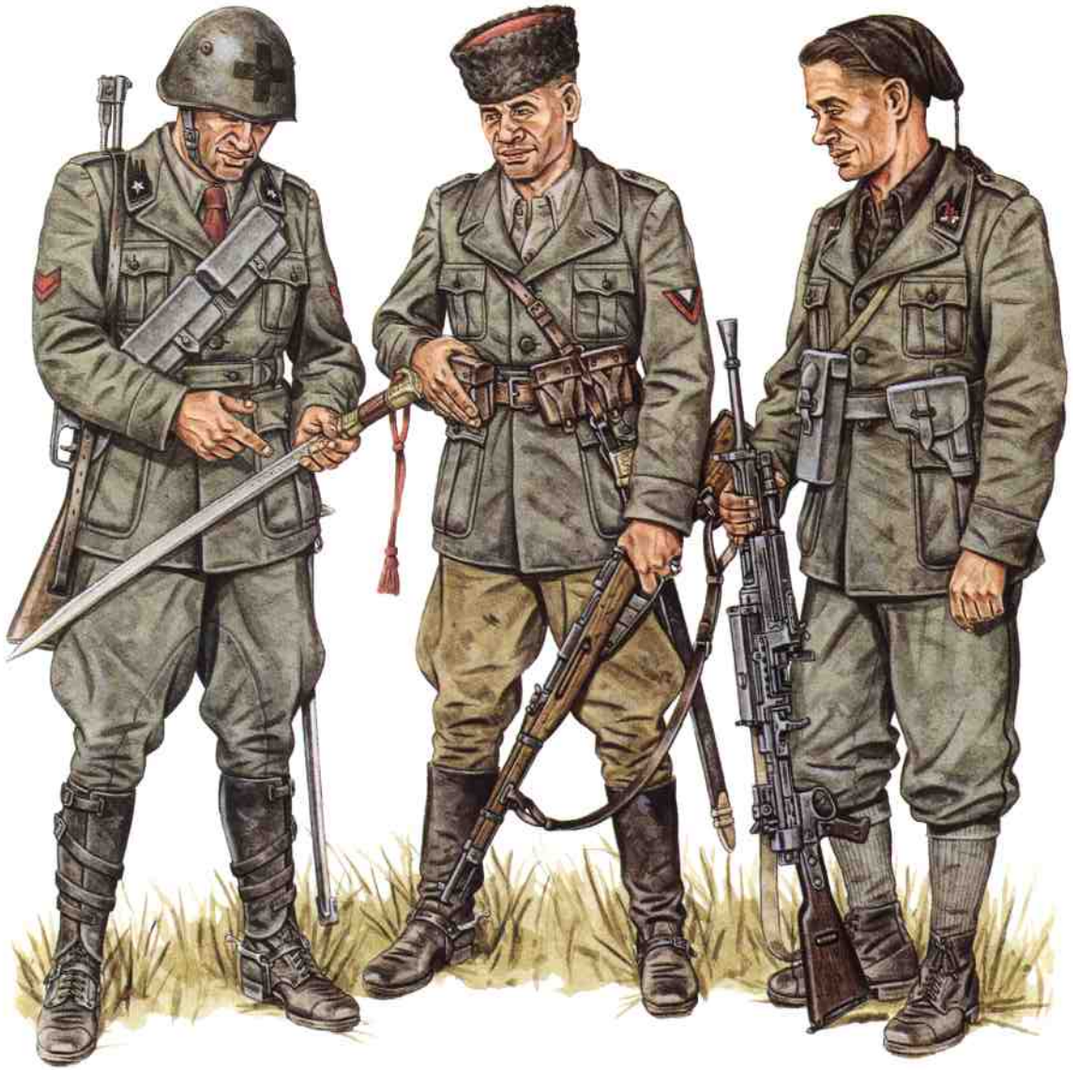
1 2 3

RUSSIAN FRONT, 1941-43

1: Soldato, 'Savoia' Dragoon Regt, 1941

2: Cossack volunteer, Gruppo Savoia, 1942

3: Camicia nera scelta, MVSN 14th M Bn 'Leonessa', '23 Marzo' Regimental Group, 1941



1 2 3

RUSSIAN FRONT, 1942

1: Volunteer, Italian Croatian Legion
2: Sergente, 79th Inf Regt, 'Pasubio' Inf Div
3: Alpino, 'Monte Cervino' Ski Battalion

1 2 3

OCCUPATION OF YUGOSLAVIA, 1941-43

1: Capo manipolo, MVSN 67th Bn 'Toscano'; Dalmatia, 1942
2: Soldato, 84th Inf Regt, 'Venezia' Inf Div, 1942
3: Capo squadra, MVAC; Dalmatia, 1942

1 2 3

OCCUPATION OF THE BALKANS, 1941-43

1: Vice-brigadiere, 8th Bn, Royal Finance Guard; Greece, 1941
2: Appuntato, 13th Mobile Bn, Royal Carabiniers, 'Firenze' Inf Div; Albania, 1942
3: Sergente maggiore, 27th Bn, 11th Bersaglieri Regt, 1st Celere Div 'Eugenia di Savoia'; Yugoslavia

1 2 3

the flame-thrower suit but tighter fitting around the face and other extremities. Unbearably hot even in the southern European climate, these were soon discontinued when the threat of chemical warfare faded.

Other protective items included asbestos mittens worn by machine gun crews when changing the hot barrels of their weapons. Grey-green leather gloves with ringmail protecting the palms were also used by mortar and machine gun crews for the same reason.

Fatigues

Fatigue uniforms were issued to be worn as work clothes when performing menial tasks in the barracks and on work details. The uniform consisted of a medium grey loose-fitting cotton jacket and pantaloon trousers made of poor quality material. Insignia on the uniform consisted of white cloth stars on the collar, and rank chevrons where appropriate. There is evidence that fatigues were sometimes worn on the march in summertime, presumably to save wear and tear on the grey-green wool uniform and for greater comfort.

* * *

Personal equipment

The standard rifle was either the M1891 Mannlicher Carcano in 6.5mm or the slightly modernised M1891/1938 version firing a 7.35mm round; each had a six-round fixed magazine.

The Italian soldier's personal equipment in the infantry and other unmounted branches consisted of a grey-green leather belt with a single-claw buckle usually worn off-set to the left. Two leather cartridge pouches were worn together at the front, each carrying four six-round

A mixed group of six soldiers stand in a Russian town having just received medals for bravery. From left to right: a *sergente maggiore* and two privates of the Bersaglieri; a *caporale maggiore* of artillery; and an officer and *sergente maggiore* of infantry. The three Bersaglieri and the artilleryman are wearing the greatcoat issued to mounted troops with the large shawl collar. The infantry officer wears the officers' double-breasted model of the M1934 greatcoat, and the NCO the single-breasted version. There is also an interesting mix of equipment; the two Bersaglieri privates wear their own special belt with two small cartridge pouches, the gunner the two-pocket bandolier, the infantry officer a 'Sam Browne' belt with holstered Beretta M1934, and the infantry NCO the standard belt with twin pouches. (USSME)

clips of rifle ammunition. These were supported by a looped strap which fastened to D-rings behind the pouches and passed around the neck – from the viewpoint of weight distribution this was a poorer design than the Y- or X-straps used by other armies.

The bayonet was carried in a fluted grey metal scabbard fastened to the belt at the left hip by means of a grey-green leather frog. An entrenching tool could also be worn on the belt in a combination frog with the bayonet.

The M1939 knapsack worn on the back accomodated the soldier's personal kit. Slung over the right shoulder he also carried a gasmask bag of either M1933 or M1935 model. A light canvas haversack or 'tactical bag' was also sometimes carried slung; and both types of gasmask bag served as extra stowage space when the gasmask was discarded after the threat of gas attack diminished. Fluted aluminium waterbottles, worn slung over the left shoulder, came in two different sizes – a larger capacity type was issued to Alpini.

The most up-to-date item – well ahead of its time when first introduced – was the M1929 camouflaged tent section or shelter quarter. Of tightly woven cotton duck printed with a camouflage pattern of forest green, chestnut brown and grey, this could be joined with others to make a light tent. It could also be adapted for wear as a poncho which gave protection against the elements as well as providing good camouflage.

Croatian Legion volunteers *en route* for the Russian Front parade their flag – note the 'vandyked' edging in the old Austro-Hungarian style – and the MVSN pennant which shows that they were officially part of that organisation. On the left arm of the flag-bearer's greatcoat can be seen the chequerboard shield of the Legion, and on the collar the white metal fasces of the MVSN. (USSME)

MVSN AND FOREIGN TROOPS' UNIFORMS

The MVSN or Blackshirt units wore the same basic uniform as the Royal Army with a few slight differences.

Collar insignia on the standard tunic was a black double flame with a small silver fasces instead of the star of the Royal Army. The 'M Battalions' had a red stylised letter M on the black flames with the silver fasces passing through it. Black cotton shirts were often worn under the tunic instead of the grey-green Army type; and a narrow black stripe was often worn down the side of the pantaloons. These were often worn with black wool socks pulled up to just below the knee, and over the top of these a pair of white socks with the tops rolled down over the top of the boot.

Combat headgear was the usual M1933 steel helmet; but a soft black felt fez with a hanging tassel was worn instead of the *bustina*, and sometimes in combat. One item unique to the MVSN was the black

OPPOSITE **Slovenian MVAC recruits parade with their Italian comrades; all wear the black beret in widespread use by these troops. Cap badges were either a silver death's-head or a small Roman sword with a round buckler in the centre. The tunics and trousers of the rank and file would appear to be M1940 Italian issue dyed black, while the MVAC officer on the right is wearing grey-green (note the light colour of the Italian officer's uniform). Rifles and equipment are all Italian Army issue; this group seem very well dressed and kitted out. (Modern History Museum, Llubjana)**

Russia, 1942: the crew of a 47mm anti-tank gun prepare for action. By this stage in the war the '47/32' had become ineffective against Soviet armour, but these were the best the Italians had – and even they were in short supply. In this cold the crew have only the standard single-breasted greatcoats with balaclavas and gloves. (USSME)

bustina, exactly the same as the grey-green Army type but dyed black. These were worn from the mid-1930s and were very popular with officers of the 'M Battalions'.

The MVSN had a completely different rank system based notionally on ancient Imperial Roman titles. Although some MVSN ranks had direct equivalents in the Royal Army, others did not (see chart on page 42).

Foreign volunteers: Albanian troops

Albanian MVSN Legion volunteers wore a white felt fez with the Blackshirt badge on the front; this does seem from photographic evidence to have been worn in combat alongside the M1933 helmet. The rest of the uniform and insignia were of standard MVSN type, the only other distinguishing feature being a small round bakelite badge worn on the left sleeve (see Plate B3).

Cacciatori d'Albania units raised in 1941 wore normal Italian uniform with their own collar insignia. This consisted of a red patch with blue edge and a black diagonal stripe, bearing a white metal antelope-crested 'Skanderbeg' helmet above the usual star.

The Albanian Royal Guard wore standard Italian uniform with a purple 'I'-shaped collar insignia with a star and an antelope head as worn on the Skanderbeg helmet. They also wore the M1933 steel helmet with a black stencilled Skanderbeg helmet on the front.

MVAC troops

The Yugoslavian MVAC volunteers were dressed in a wide variety of uniforms with each region having its own distinct type; these often included a mix of Italian and pre-war Yugoslavian Army items. Slovenian volunteers wore either Italian or Yugoslavian tunics, initially with Yugoslavian sidecaps. The wearing of black berets was widespread, and these were usually adorned with badges of one of two types. One had a skull with either

A group of Alpini artillerymen in shirt sleeve order manhandle a 65mm mountain gun during an anti-partisan operation in Yugoslavia. Some of them have put sprigs of foliage in their hat bands. With their cotton shirts they wear the wool pantaloon trousers in a loose and baggy style often seen among the Alpini. (James Burd)

crossed bones behind it or a dagger in its teeth; the other was a simple *gladius* sword, sometimes with a small round shield in front.

In 1942 the Italians issued some volunteers with 2,500 tropical uniforms dyed a tan or light brown colour. Slovenian MVAC volunteers were also issued by early 1943 with a winter uniform which consisted of a black overcoat, jacket and trousers worn with a white shirt. Some Slovenian MVAC officers were also provided by their employers with good quality Italian officers' uniforms.

Any Chetnik volunteers who were absorbed into MVAC units would have worn their usual ex-Yugoslavian Army uniforms and do not seem to have adopted MVAC rank insignia.

One small unit which wore its own unique uniform was the 'Orien' Volunteer Battalion, a 258-strong unit raised in the area around the port of Cattaro in Montenegro. They wore grey-green tunics, trousers and berets with large red oval cap badges. On the collar of the tunic they had small badges in the shape of two white metal crossed Roman swords, and the same symbol appeared in the middle of the cap badge. Other units, like the Moslem 'Sandjak' Militia of eastern Montenegro, while part of the MVAC forces were dressed in civilian clothes and were armed with whatever they could get hold of, which was probably the usual ex-Yugoslavian equipment.

Helmets were seldom worn but two models that were in use were the Adrian M1915 model and the Czech M1934. Both types were formerly in use by the Yugoslavian Army, and in the case of the Adrian the Yugoslavian coat of arms badge was removed from the front. The Slovenian 'Legion of Death,' a 1,700-strong MVAC unit, certainly wore both types of helmet with civilian and ex-Yugoslavian Army clothing when formed in August 1942.

MVAC ranks were shown by the wearing of small triangular pieces of cloth or metal, either on a blue armband on the left sleeve, or on the front of the beret or other headgear slightly off-set to the left. While not universally displayed such insignia do seem to have been worn by the more regular units from Slovenia and Dalmatia:

Red cloth triangle – Squad sub-commander
Red cloth triangle bearing white cloth star – Squad commander
Yellow cloth triangle – Platoon sub-commander
Yellow cloth triangle bearing metal star – Platoon commander
Silver metal triangle – Company sub-commander
Silver metal triangle bearing silver star – Company commander
Gold metal triangle – Battalion sub-commander
Gold metal triangle bearing gold star – Battalion commander

Croatian Legion

The Croatian Legion raised to fight on the Russian Front wore Italian Army uniforms with MVSN insignia since they were officially part of that organisation. A silver shield with the title 'Hrvatska' at the top above a red and white chequer-board shield was worn on the left sleeve of the tunic or greatcoat. M1933 steel helmets were issued, but the great majority of legionnaires seem to have worn the standard *bustina* side cap with an MVSN badge on the front. (See Plate F1.)

Cossack Volunteers

The small Cossack volunteer unit raised by the Italian Army on the Eastern Front was originally issued with Italian tunics and breeches. Ex-Soviet Cossack trousers were also worn. A chevron in the Russian national colours of white, blue and red was worn on the left sleeve of the tunic, and was the only distinguishing insignia of the unit. (Some sources say that the chevron was worn on the right sleeve, but as the Italian Army always wore unit and other insignia on the left arm it is fairly safe to assume that their Russian auxiliaries followed suit.) Later the Cossacks were allowed to wear their own national dress which consisted of the black *Tcherkesska* heel-length coat with the same chevron insignia on the sleeve. Both types of uniform were worn with the Cossack lambswool *papacha* cap, which came in white or black. (See Plate E2.)

A Blackshirt of an 'M Battalion' stationed in Yugoslavia to fight partisans marches past with a Breda M1930 light machine gun on his shoulder. The insignia of a red stylised 'M' for Mussolini with a silver fasces through the middle can be clearly seen on the double black flame collar patch; see also Plate E3. The rest of the uniform is standard M1940 Army issue apart from the black cotton shirt. (USSME)

This unit of ski troops on anti-partisan patrol in the mountains of Yugoslavia wear the two-piece snow suits more usually associated with service in Russia. By this date – winter 1942/43 – the branch badge was no longer stencilled on the steel helmet. They wear standard leather equipment, and the foreground man is using a canvas 'tactical bag' to carry his gear. (USSME)

Table A: Infantry Divisions serving in Europe 1940-43

Key
^ = Mountain division
** = Motorised division
* = Semi-motorised division
~ = Assault landing division
> = Air landing division
‡ = (1st, 2nd, 3rd Granatieri Inf Regts)

Notes: Most of these 'specialist role' designations were largely notional; e.g. the 'mountain' (as opposed to Alpine) division differed from a standard infantry division only in having some mule-borne artillery.

Key
A = Albania, C = Corsica, F = French campaign, G = Greek campaign; gar = Garrison duties, e.g. Sar-gar = Sardinia garrison; NAf = North Africa; occ = Occupation duties,e.g. G-occ = occupation of Greece; R = Russia, Sar = Sardinia, Sic = Sicily, VF = Vichy France (occupation post-Nov.42), Y = Yugoslavian campaign

Division Name	*Division No.*	*Inf.Regt. Nos.*	*Arty. Regt.No.*	*MVSN Legion*	*War service (see key)*	*Collar patch*
Acqui	33	17,18,317	33	23	F, G, G-occ	Yellow/black stripe
Aosta	28	210,211	22	171	Sic-gar	Red/black stripe
Arezzo	53	225,226,343	53	80	G, A-gar, Y	Yellow/blue
Assietta^	26	29,30	25	17	F, Y, Sic-gar	Green/black stripes
Bari	47	139,140,340	47	152	G, Sar-gar	Red over yellow
Bergamo	15	25,26	4	89	Y, Y-occ	Blue/red stripe
Brennero	11	231, 232, 331	9	45	G, G-occ	Red/yellow
Cacciatori delle Alpi	22	51,52	1	105	F, Y-occ	Green
Cagliari	59	63,64,363	59	28	F, G, G-occ	Red/white stripes
Calabria	31	59,60,359	40	177	Sar-gar	Red/green stripe
Casale	56	11,12,311	56	23	G, G-occ	Yellow
Cosseria	5	89,90	37	45	F, R	Maroon/white stripes
Cremona	44	21,22,321	7	90	F, C-gar	Green/red stripes
Cuneo	6	7,8	27	24	F, G, G-occ	Maroon
Emilia	155	119,120	155	—	Y-occ	Red over green
Ferrara	23	47,48	14	82	G, A/Y-occ	Blue/red stripes
Firenze	41	127,128	41	92	F, Y, Y-occ	Black over red
Forli^	36	43,44,343	36	112	F, G, G-occ	White/blue stripes
Friuli~	20	87,88,387	35	88	F, C-occ	Blue/black stripe
Granatieri di Sardegna‡	21	1,2,3	13	55	F, Y, Y-occ	Red/white 'lace'
Isonzo	14	23,24	6	98	Y	Blue
Legnano	58	67,68	58	26	A-occ, VF	Black/blue stripes
Livorno~	4	33,34	28	195	F, Sic-gar	Orange
Lombardia	57	73,74	57	137	Y, Y-occ	White/blue stripe
Lupi di Toscana	7	77,78	30	—	F, G, VF	Red/white stripe
Macerata	153	121,122	153	15	Y-occ	White over blue
Mantova	104	113,114	11	—	Sic-gar?	Yellow over green
Marche	32	55,56	32	49	Y, Y-occ	Blue/white stripe
Messina	18	93,94	2	108	Y, Y-occ	Yellow/red stripes
Modena	37	41,42,341	29	36	F, G, G-occ	White/maroon stripes
Murge	154	259,260	154	—	Y-occ	Black /red/black
Napoli	54	75,76	54	173	Sic-gar	White/maroon stripe
Novara	157	153,154	157	—	depot	Yellow over blue
Parma	49	49,50	49	109	G, A-occ	Blue/white stripes
Pasubio*	9	79,80	8	—	Y, R	Red/yellow stripes
Perugia	151	129,130	151	—	Y/A-occ	Red over blue
Piacenza*	103	111,112	37	—	Italy-gar	White over blue
Piave**	10	57,58	20	—	G, VF	Green/black stripe
Piceno	152	235,236,336	152	—	Italy-gar	White/red/white
Piemonte	29	3,4,303	24	166	G, G-occ	Red
Pinerolo	24	13,14,313	18	136	F, G, Y, G-occ	Black/red stripes
Pistoia**	16	35,36	3	63	F, NAf	Orange/black stripe
Puglie	38	71,72	15	115	Y, Y/A-occ	White/green stripe
Ravenna	3	37,38	121	5	Y, R	White/red stripes
Re	13	1,2	23	75	Y, Y-occ	Black/red stripes
Regina	50	9,10,309,331	50	201	Italy-gar	White
Rovigo*	105	227,228	117	—	Italy-gar	Green/yellow
Sabauda	30	45,46	16	176	Sar-gar	White/green stripes
Sassari	12	151,152	34	73	Y-occ	White over red
Sforzesca	2	53,54	17	30	F, G, R	Green/white stripe
Siena	51	31,32	51	141	G, G-occ	Black/yellow stripes
Superga>	1	91,92	5	2	F, NAf	Maroon/white stripe
Taro	48	207,208	48	164	Y/A-occ	White/blue
Torino**	52	81,82	52	—	Y, R	Blue/yellow stripe
Veneto	159	255,256	159	—	Italy-gar	Blue/yellow/blue
Venezia	19	83,84,383	19	72	G, G/Y-occ	Maroon/blue stripe
Vicenza	156	277,278	156	—	R	Maroon/white/maroon
Zara	158	291,292	158	—	Y-occ	Blue/yellow stripes

THE PLATES

A: WESTERN ALPS, 1940

A1: Gunner, 59th Artillery Regiment, 'Cagliari' Infantry Division

A member of the crew for a 75mm field gun, he wears the Model 1933 steel helmet with the black stencilled artillery branch badge on the front. Underneath this he wears his *bustina* in lieu of a woollen cap; when used in this way the *bustina* soon wore out and could not be worn for its intended purpose. His M1937 jacket has a black-faced collar piped in yellow for the artillery, and bearing his division's identifying patches – red with white stripes, and the national silver star. The black leather gaiters and grey-green leather bandolier were worn by a variety of mounted units as well as the artillery.

A2: Caporale, 89th Infantry Regiment, 'Cosseria' Infantry Division

Like nearly all Italian troops fighting in this campaign the corporal still wears the M1937 uniform underneath his M1934 greatcoat. The greatcoat, worn throughout the war and even in Russia, lacked warmth because it was single-breasted. His cap is the popular *bustina*, and he is holding the M1933 helmet, both with infantry branch badges. His light machine gun is the 6.5mm Breda M1930; a poor design, chronically prone to feed problems in the field due to a dirt-attracting cartridge lubrication system, it nevertheless had to serve the Italian Army throughout the war.

A3: Sergente, 'Val d'Orco' Battalion, 4th Alpine Regiment, 'Taurinense' Alpine Division

The 'Taurinense' was one of several Alpine divisions deployed in this campaign in the mountainous border region between France and Italy. This NCO wears the M1937 uniform; his felt Alpini hat has the green pom-pon of a 3rd Battalion attached to the feather-holder on the left side. On the left sleeve above his rank chevrons he wears the divisional arm shield which although being phased out was still worn at this time. The special equipment used by these mountain troops includes a M1939 mountain rucksack and climbing rope and a M1934 alpenstock. His rifle is the standard M1891 6.5mm Carcano used by most Italian soldiers during the war.

B: GREECE, 1940-41

B1: Caporale, 31st Infantry Regiment, 'Siena' Infantry Division

This junior NCO wears the standard M1940 uniform, with M1933 helmet and M1912 boots, as worn by the Italian Army throughout 1940-43. On the left sleeve above his rank chevrons he wears the woven badge of the 'Arditi' troops – an upright *gladius* between laurel and oak sprays – signifying that he has volunteered for a special assault squad within his regiment. The single gold chevron high on his right sleeve is a wound stripe; these came in three colours – gold for wounded in action, silver for wounded in service, and red for wounded in the national cause. On the grey-green collar of the M1940 jacket he wears his divisional patches.

The Carcano M1891 rifle – which served the Italian Army for over 50 years in various models – fired a 6.5mm round which lacked stopping power. There had been attempts to convert them to 7.35mm, and from 1938 some rifles in the new calibre were issued. The onset of war found this programme incomplete, and from 1940 all new rifles reverted to 6.5mm; but the 7.35mm rifles were already in use alongside the old calibre, causing logistic nightmares.

B2: Soldato, 77th Infantry Regiment, 'Lupi di Toscana' Infantry Division

This infantryman of the 'Wolves of Tuscany' Division wears the same uniform as B1. His equipment consists of the M1939 knapsack, to which is fastened a M1929 camou-flaged tent section/poncho, and an aluminium mess tin (which could also be carried in its own cover). The gasmask bag is the M1935; later the gasmask was often discarded so that the bag could be used to carry other kit. His standard issue waterbottle is slung on the right, and on the left, in a combination frog with the bayonet, one of three different varieties of entrenching tool.

B3: Camicia nera , 1st Albanian Legion MVSN, 1941

This unit consisted of Albanians recruited since the take-over of their country by Italy in April 1939. Most Albanian units were very unreliable – some even shot their Italian officers and deserted – but this particular Legion came out of the

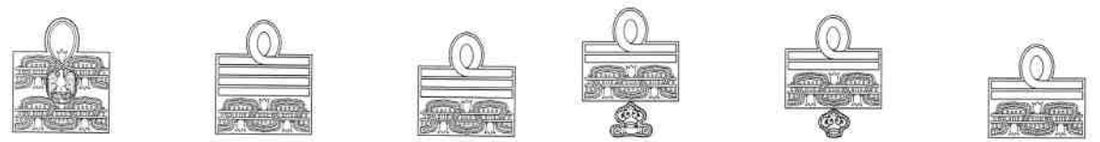
Table B: Alpine Divisions serving in Europe 1940-43

Division Name	*Division No.*	*Alpine Inf. Regt. Nos.*[1]	*Alpine Arty. Regt. No.*	*War service (see key, Table A)*	*Collar patch*
Taurinense	1	3, 4	1	F, VF-gar, Y-occ	(All, double green flames)
Tridentina	2	5, 6	2	F, A-occ, R	
Julia	3	8, 9	3	G, G-occ, R	
Cuneense	4	1, 2	4	F, G, Y, R	
Pusteria	5	7, 11	5	F, A, G, Y-occ, VF-occ	
Alpi Graie	6	III Grp, IV Grp[2]	6	A-occ	

Notes: 1. Alpine Infantry Regts began the war with varying numbers of battalions, but from 1942 were standardised at 3 battalions each of 3 companies.
2. II & IV Alpine Groups each had 3 battalions

Royal Italian Army Rank Insignia, 25 July 1940 – 8 September 1943

These insignia were worn on the grey-green M1940 field tunic and M1934 greatcoat. **Colours: (1 – 7)** General officers, *ufficiali generali*; on forearms, silver wire embroidered *greca*, thin bars and loop on grey/green backing; gold wire embroidered eagle (1), crown (4, 5) and sceptre (5) on brick red backing. **(8 – 13)** Field officers, *ufficiali superiori*; on forearms gold wire/yellow thin and thick bars and loop, on brick red backing (8, 9, 11). **(14 – 21)** Subaltern officers, *ufficiali inferiori*; on forearms gold wire/yellow thin bars, loop and star; brick red backing in loop (15, 18); black silk centre to gold thin bar and loop (21). **(22 – 25)** Senior NCOs, *sottufficiali*; on shoulder straps gold wire/yellow braid with black silk centre stripes. **(26 – 30)** Junior NCOs and senior other ranks, *sergenti e graduati*; on upper arms gold/yellow (26, 27) or red wool (28-30) chevrons. Junior other ranks, *trupa* (private, *soldato*) wore no insignia. From 1940 officers' insignia on everyday uniforms was suposed to change from gold to yellow braid.



1. *Primo Maresciallo dell'Impero* (Field-Marshal)
2. *Maresciallo d'Italia* (Field-Marshal)
3. *Generale d'armata* (General)
4. *Generale designato d'armata* (Acting Gen)
5. *Generale di corpo d'armata* (Lt Gen)
6. *Generale di divisione* (Maj Gen)
7. *Generale di brigata* (Brigadier)
8. *Colonello igs* (Colonel)
9. *Colonello titulare* (Colonel)
10. *Colonello* (Colonel)
11. *Tenente colonello igs* (Lt Col)
12. *Tenente colonello* (Lt Col)
13. *Maggiore* (Major)
14. *Primo capitano* (Senior Capt)
15. *Capitano igs* (Captain)
16. *Capitano* (Captain)
17. *Primo tenente* (Senior Lt)
18. *Tenente igs* (Lieutenant)
19. *Tenente* (Lieutenant)
20. *Sottotenente* (2nd Lieutenant)
21. *Aspirante ufficiale* (Acting 2nd Lt)
22. *Alutante di battaglia* (WOI)
23. *Maresciallo maggiore* (WOII)
24. *Maresciallo capo* (Staff Sgt)
25. *Maresciallo ordinario* (Sergeant)
26. *Sergente maggiore* (Lance Sgt)
27. *Sergente* (Corporal)
28. *Caporale maggiore* (Senior Lance Cpl)
29. *Caporale* (Lance Cpl)
30. *Soldato scelto* (Senior Private)

Notes: Due to the proliferation of Italian NCO ranks the British equivalents given here are only approximate. 1.Rank created 1938 for King Vittorio Emanuele III & Mussolini. 3.Rank held only in wartime. 4.Lt Gen appointed to command a field army. 8. 'igs' = incaricato con grado superiore – appointed to a higher command, here Col commanding a brigade. 9. Col commanding a regiment. 11. Lt Col commanding a regiment. 14. Capt with 12 years' seniority or 20 years' commissioned service. 15. Capt commanding a battalion. 17. Lt with 12 years' seniority or 20 years' commissioned service. 18. Lt commanding a company. 21. Lowest commissioned rank for reserve officers. 22. Rank reintroduced 21/11/40 to reward bravery in field by men whose lack of education prevented promotion to commissioned rank. 30. In cavalry, Appuntato.

MVSN Rank Insignia, 11 June 1940 – 8 September 1943

Colours: (1 – 2) Field marshals, *caporali d'onore*; on upper sleeves red chevrons (1, later gold) on black triangle, gold-embroidered eagle (1) or fasces (2). **(3 – 8)** General officers, *ufficiali generali* ; gold wire embroidered *greca* with gold fasces, thin gold bars and diamond on grey-green backing; gold crown and sceptre on brick red backing (4), brick red backing to diamond (5, 7). **(9 – 14)** Field officers, *ufficiali superiori*; on forearms, gold wire thin and thick bars and diamond; on brick red backing (9, 10, 12). **(15 – 22)** Subaltern officers, *ufficiali inferiori*; on forearms, gold wire thin bars, diamond and star; brick red backing to diamond (16, 19); gold thin bar and diamond with black silk zigzag (22). **(23 – 25)** Senior NCOs, *sottufficiali*; on black piped shoulder straps, silver braid bars and badge. **(26 – 30)** Junior NCOs and senior other ranks, *capi squadra e graduati*; on upper sleeves silver wire (26, 27) or red wool (28-30) chevrons. Junior other ranks – *camicie nere* pl., *camicia nera* sing.- wore no insignia.

1. *Primo caporale d'onore*
(Field Marshal)

2. *Caporale d'onore*
(Field Marshal)

3. *Comandante generale*
(General)

4. *Luogotenente generale, Capo di stato maggiore*
(Acting Gen)

5. *Luogotenente generale (ruolo speciale)*
(Maj Gen)

6. *Luogotenente generale*
(Maj Gen)

7. *Console generale igs*
(Brigadier)

8. *Console generale*
(Brigadier)

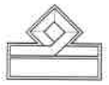
9. *Console igs*
(Colonel)

10. *Console titulare*
(Colonel)

11. *Console*
(Colonel)

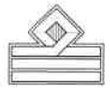
12. *Primo seniore igs*
(Lt Col)

13. *Primo seniore*
(Lt Col)

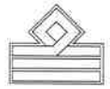


14. *Seniore*
(Major)

15. *Primo centurione*
(Senior Capt)

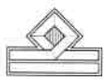


16. *Centurione igs*
(Captain)

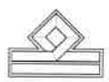


17. *Centurione*
(Captain)

18. *Primo capo manipolo*
(Senior Lt)



19. *Capo manipolo igs*
(Lieutenant)



20. *Capo manipolo*
(Lieutenant)

21. *Sottocapo manipolo*
(2nd Lieutenant)

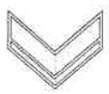
22. *Aspirante sottocapo manipolo*
(Acting 2nd Lt)

23. *Primo aiutante*
(WOII)

24. *Aiutante capo*
(Staff Sgt)

25. *Aiutante*
(Sergeant)

26. *Prino capo squadra*
(Lance Sgt)



27. *Capo squadra*
(Corporal)

28. *Vice capo squadra*
(Senior Lance Cpl)

29. *Camicia nera scelta*
(Lance Cpl)

30. *Camicia nera*
(Private)

Notes: 1. Honorary rank held by Mussolini. 2. Honorary rank held by prominent personalities. 3. The highest professional rank. 4. Appointment held by Chief of Staff; retired CoSs had grey-green backing to crown and sceptre. 5. Maj Gen assigned special duties. 7. Brigadier commanding a brigade *(raggruppamento)*. 9. Colonel commanding a brigade, with general officer's cap badge. 10. Colonel commanding a legion. 12. Lt Col commanding a regiment. 15. Capt with 12 years' seniority or 20 years' commissioned service. 16. Captain commanding a battalion. 18. Lt with 12 years' seniority or 20 years' commissioned service. 19. Lieutenant commanding a company. 22. Lowest commissioned rank for reserve officers, abolished late 1940. 23. Rank of *aiutante di battaglia* (WOI), superior to *primo aiutante*, may have been introduced 21.11.40, but no insignia have been discovered.

This enlisted soldier is in training, as shown by the white stripe round the edge of his collar. (A stripe all the way around the collar indicated officer training, and a section round the front point only, NCO training.) This also provides a good view of the upper part of the M1940 tunic, with its pleated pockets and integral cloth belt. (Rex Trye)

fighting with credit. He wears the standard uniform of the Italian Blackshirts; the obvious distinctive feature is the white felt fez based on his country's national headgear. On his left sleeve he also wears a badge made from bakelite – the double-headed black eagle of Albania on a red background. His rank of 'Blackshirt' is the MVSN equivalent of an Army private, so he has no rank insignia. He is armed with a Carcano M1891 carbine with integral folding bayonet; on his belt he carries the dagger used by all Blackshirt troops, and an OTO M35 grenade – one of three types in use with the Italian Army in World War II.

C: GREECE, 1940-41

C1: Capitano, 'Edolo' Alpine Battalion, 5th Alpine Regiment, 'Tridentina' Alpine Division

This captain in the Alpini wears the officers' version of the felt hat with a gold woven badge of the corps on the front; on the left side a black eagle's feather is mounted behind a gold boss, and his rank is indicated by three chevrons. He wears the M1940 wool jacket and pantaloons made from a superior grade of material befitting his rank. On the collar he displays the green double flames of the Alpini with the officers' pattern star, and his rank insignia is worn on the lower sleeves. The grey-green shirt and tie are also of superior quality to those of the rank and file. Instead of puttees he has a pair of ribbed woollen socks pulled up over the bottoms of his pantaloons; these are worn with privately purchased M1912 black leather climbing boots. He carries a brown leather mapcase and is armed with a 9mm Beretta M1934 semi-automatic pistol, the favourite sidearm of the Italian Army.

C2: Generale di brigata, Army Headquarters, 1940

This brigade general wears the officers' version of the *bustina* made – like the rest of his uniform – from *'cordellino'* material of a greyer shade than issue grey-green wool. His rank is shown by the insignia on the left side of the cap and on his lower sleeves. The tunic is the wartime pattern introduced in 1940 and worn concurrently with the pre-war *'Baistrocchi'* type with black velvet collar and piping. He wears breeches and high black leather boots, and his Beretta M1934 is holstered on his 'Sam Browne' type belt.

C3: Maggiore, 54th Infantry Regiment, 'Sforzesca' Infantry Division, 1941

This major wears the popular 'windcheater' officers' coat widely worn at that time. Made from coarse canvas cloth, it is double-breasted and has brown leather shoulder patches; forearm ranking is worn in the usual way. He wears the *bustina* in grey-green wool; his rank is shown by the gold woven star in a gold 'frame' on the left side, and his unit by the gold wire front badge of the infantry branch with the the number '54' in the centre. Under his coat he is wearing an officers' grey-green cotton shirt and tie, and gabardine breeches with two 2cm black stripes with a central red piping signifying the infantry branch. His knee high boots may have been purchased privately; they were often replaced with more practical ankle boots during the course of the war.

D: YUGOSLAVIA, 1941

D1: Tenente, 'Centauro' Armoured Division

This first lieutenant wears the black leather coat issued to armoured troops in all theatres of war, and carries the leather crash helmet worn inside his vehicle; during his cigarette break he wears a high quality *bustina*. He has cloth ranking sewn to the lower coat sleeves. Under the coat he wears the M1940 wool jacket instead of the loose-fitting blue overalls more usually worn by most tank crews. On the jacket collar are the patches of the armoured divisions, with a red flame on a blue background. He wears officers' woollen breeches with the black leather leggings sometimes worn by armoured crews as well as mounted and artillery troops. His boots are better quality officers' versions of the M1912 pattern.

D2: Sergente, 3rd Motorcycle Company, 3rd Bersaglieri Regiment, 3rd Celere Division 'Principe Amedeo Duca d'Aosta'

This is a despatch rider from one of the 'fast divisions' – the term for cavalry divisions in the Italian Army. He wears the M1933 helmet with the famous cockerel feathers of the Bersaglieri atttached. His pullover smock was a popular and

A colonel of a support branch wearing the grey-green peaked service cap. His rank is indicated by the number of bands of braid – reflected light obscures these here, but there are three thin above one thick, divided by narrow lines of the hat colour. He may well be a member of the Medical Corps, in which case his single collar flames would be amaranth (maroon). The cap badge has the cross in the centre to signify that he is at Army Headquarters or attached to a military school. (Rex Trye)

practical item worn throughout the war. On the left sleeve is the red arm badge of the despatch rider above his gold/yellow rank chevrons. He is wearing leather mounted troops, and artillery leggings, and has the special belt and ammunition pouches of the Bersaglieri. He is armed with the Carcano M1891/1938 carbine, a slightly modified version of the M1891.

D3: Caporale maggiore, 23rd Sector, Frontier Guards

Guardia alla Frontiera units – designated as 'sectors' – were quite heavily involved in combat during the invasion of Yugoslavia. This NCO wears the standard M1940 Army tunic and pantaloons, the collar bearing the single green flame with red border which denotes the GAF infantry arm. His hat is the same as worn by the Alpini but without the feather-holder, which is replaced by a decoration called the *'Nappina'* – again in the green and red colours of the infantry. On the front is the metal cap badge with his unit number 'XXIII'. The GAF wore the M1933 helmet in combat.

E: RUSSIAN FRONT, 1941-43

E1: Soldato, 'Savoia' Dragoon Regiment, 1941

Horsed cavalry may have been largely obsolete by this time, but as this regiment proved, when properly deployed against a disorganised enemy they could still be deadly. On 24 August 1942 at Tschebarevskij on the Don one squadron of this unit bravely charged 2,000 Soviet infantry with sabre and hand grenade while the rest of the regiment made a dismounted attack; the enemy were routed, though at a cost. This trooper wears the M1933 helmet with a black cross, special to the Savoia Regt, on the front; his M1940 tunic has the regiment's black triple flame collar patch – decorated with red piping in 1942. The other distinctive item of this regiment's uniform is the red necktie (adopted in memory of a wounded messenger of the regiment in the 18th century who reported to his general with the white lace collar of his uniform covered in his own blood). These black leather leggings were worn by other ranks in the cavalry. He is armed with a M1891/1938 carbine and a M1871 sabre. Captured Soviet PPSh41 sub-machine guns were very popular with the Savoia troopers and were often used in combat; one was in fact carried by the officer in command of their famous charge.

E2: Cossack volunteer, Gruppo Savoia, 1942

The Italian 8th Army followed their German allies' example in Russia and recruited their own small unit or *sotnia* of Cossacks in September 1942; total strength was a colonel, four other officers and 360 Cossacks. The unit was eventually attached to the lancers of the 'Novaria' Regt; after the Italian withdrawal from Russia they joined German Cossack units. This volunteer wears a red-topped black lambswool *papacha* cap; an Italian M1940 jacket issued to him by his new employers; and ex-Red Army breeches and boots. On the left sleeve he has a chevron national insignia in the Russian colours of white, blue and red. He retains Red Army leather equipment and his Moisin Nagant M1910 rifle, and is showing his Italian comrade his traditional *shashka* sabre.

E3: Camicia nera scelta, MVSN 14th M Battalion 'Leonessa', '23 Marzo' Regimental Group, 1941

'M' (for Mussolini) battalions were raised from battle-proven Blackshirt volunteers and were given a more active combat role than their less reliable fellow fascists. These units were particularly active in fighting partisans in Yugoslavia and were included in the 8th Army sent to Russia. This senior private wears the MVSN black fez, which was often seen in combat, and the collar patch of double black flames with an entwined red M and silver fasces. As an LMG gunner he has on his belt a holstered pistol, and also the tools and spares pouch for the Breda M1930.

F: RUSSIAN FRONT, 1942

F1: Volunteer, Italian Croatian Legion

This small unit, recruited in Croatia during the Italian occupation for service in Russia, was made up of an infantry battalion, a mortar company and an anti-tank company. This volunteer wears the M1934 wool greatcoat – totally inadequate for Russian winter conditions; on the left sleeve is the Croatian national shield, a red and silver/white chequerboard shield beneath 'Hrvatska' ('Croatia' in Croatian). Because the Legion was ostensibly a Blackshirt unit he has the white metal fasces of that movement on his coat collar and the MVSN cap badge on his *bustina*, which he wears with the flaps pulled down over a privately acquired balaclava. In these conditions the issue M1912 hobnailed boots were a virtual guarantee of frostbite. His rifle is the modified M1938 version of the 6.5mm M1891 Carcano; he has a Breda 35 grenade fastened to his belt.

F2: Sergente, 79th Infantry Regiment, 'Pasubio' Infantry Division

This NCO has managed to equip himself better than most for the Russian winter. He is wearing the padded, lined, double-breasted version of the greatcoat, and has been supplied with a Rumanian *ciacula* fleece cap purchased by his commanding officer. This was not standard issue, though to give it a more official look many soldiers sewed on the badges from their forage caps. This man has been very fortunate in getting hold of a pair of insulated canvas overboots, and has a woollen balaclava and 'trigger finger' mittens. He carries a Polish Marosczek WZ35 anti-tank rifle,

Two Carabinieri on guard outside a railway station somewhere in occupied Yugoslavia in 1942. Both wear the *'lucerna'* bicorn hat with the grey-green cloth cover and black badge, the M1934 single-breasted greatcoat, puttees, and the M1891 black leather bandolier. The Carabinieri performed security police duties throughout the occupied areas in addition to their primary role as military police. See Plate H2. (USSME)

An MVSN Blackshirt from the 15th Bn, attached to the 'Lupi di Toscana' Division on the Greek-Albanian border. On the collar note the MVSN's black double flames with white metal fasces. The small gold 'honour badge' of this division can just be seen above the medal ribbons on his left breast – two howling wolves' heads in an oval wreath. (USSME)

which was supplied in large numbers to the CSIR by the Germans from war booty. That they accepted such an obsolete item shows how desperate they were for some kind of weapon to use against the Soviet armour.

F3: Alpino, 'Monte Cervino' Ski Battalion

This elite unit was added to the strength of the 8th Army in Russia because of its expertise in fighting in winter conditions. The coverall is a two-piece garment, the top having laces up the front and sides so that it could be pulled tight. Rank chevrons were sometimes worn on the sleeve of the coverall, but not generally – although the strong traditions of the Alpini seem to have won out over common sense in the case of the red boss and black crow's feather worn on the white helmet cover. (Feather-holders were fastened to the helmet with a wire mount which clipped under its rim.) His special white-coloured canvas cartridge pouch belt was unique to the Alpini and had four pouches instead of the usual two. His weapon is the M1891/1938 carbine with folding bayonet.

G: OCCUPATION OF YUGOSLAVIA, 1941-43

G1: Capo manipolo, 67th Blackshirt Battalion 'Toscano', Dalmatia 1942

This Italian Blackshirt officer in command of local Yugoslav MVAC troops holds the rank equivalent to a Royal Army lieutenant. His M1940 wool jacket has double black collar flames with small red fasces; the forearm ranking has diamonds instead of loops in the top line of braid. On active

This Carabiniere stationed in Greece is a *vice-brigadiere*, equivalent to an infantry sergeant. The collar patches of the Carabinieri Reali are silver lace and black with the usual silver star; the sleeve chevrons are also in the Carbinieri's distinctive silver. The M1891 black leather bandolier was widely worn by the Carabinieri in place of the standard belt. See also Plate H2. (Franco Mesturini Archives)

OPPOSITE **MVSN Centurione (Captain) in standard service dresscap and uniform with black cotton shirt and tie. (Rex Trye)**

service he wears a pullover with his wartime pattern breeches, although he retains the smart but impractical officers' high boots. His helmet has the black stencilled badge of the MVSN on the front; tucked into his belt is his black MVSN *bustina*, worn in limited numbers from the mid-1930s. His belt supports a holstered Beretta pistol, his MVSN dagger, and a canvas pouch with 30-round magazines for his 9mm Beretta M1938A sub-machine gun. Unlike most Italian small arms of the Second World War this SMG was highly regarded by all who encountered it.

G2: Soldato, 84th Infantry Regiment, 'Venezia' Infantry Division, 1942

This private of the 'Venezia' Infantry Division wears his M1929 camouflaged tent section arranged as a poncho; this was the first camouflage-printed item issued as standard to any army, and in this at least the Italian Army was ahead of its time. Foliage is attached to his helmet by means of a cord passed through the air vents. Under the poncho he is wearing standard M1940 uniform; note the combination of long socks and puttees, often seen in the field. Note the fighting knife on his belt, the Royal Army version of the Blackshirts' dagger.

G3: Capo squadra, MVAC; Dalmatia, 1942

This colourful character is a squad leader in the Dalmatian MVAC, the 'Voluntary Anti-Communist Militia' raised from the peoples of the various regions of Italian-occupied Yugoslavia to help fight the Partisans. The distinctive headgear is a soft skull cap with a piece of black cloth tied around it and hanging down behind; on the front is the skull and dagger badge peculiar to the Dalmatian MVAC mounted on a tricolour cockade. The Dalmatian MVAC were divided into 100-strong companies called *bande*, segregated along religious lines; there were six Roman Catholic and two Orthodox *bande*, the religious affiliation being shown by the colour of the skull cap – Catholic units wore red and Orthodox companies orange. The rest of the uniform is Italian M1940; note the white rolled socks worn over the puttees at the bottom, a common Italian practice in the field. His rank is shown by his blue armband with a red cloth triangle bearing a white cloth star. His rifle is an ex-Yugoslavian Army Mauser M1924.

H: OCCUPATION OF THE BALKANS, 1941-43

H1: Vice-brigadiere, 8th Battalion, Royal Finance Guard; Epirus, Greece, 1941

The Finance Guard were an integral part of the Army with a peacetime role as an anti-smuggling and anti-espionage service. Their wartime responsibility for internal and external security led to small units being posted throughout occupied territories; and these became relatively easy targets for Partisan attacks. The Finance Guard had a slightly different rank system from the rest of the Army – this *vice-brigadiere* is the equivalent to a sergeant. His uniform is the standard Army issue with the yellow double flame collar patch of the Finance Guard, and his helmet is varnished as was the usual practice with these troops. The M1935 gasmask bag is here used to carry grenades, as was often the case during the war. His weapon is the M1891/1924 carbine.

H2: Appuntato, 13th Mobile Battalion, Royal Carabiniers, 'Firenze' Infantry Division; Albania, 1942

The Carabinieri Reali were the senior corps of the Italian Army, and fulfilled the role of military police. They had their own unique system of ranks; this *appuntato* is the equivalent to a *caporale maggiore* in the infantry branch. He wears the traditional *'lucerna'* bicorn hat; made of black felt, in the field this was worn with a grey-green cloth cover with a cloth version of the cap badge on the front. The rest of the uniform is normal M1940 issue, with the large, distinctive collar patches of the Royal Carabiniers. As he is on guard duty he wears basic equipment, including the grey-green leather mounted troops' bandolier for his carbine ammunition but with a holstered 10.35mm Bodeo Glisenti M1889 revolver attached to the end.

H3: Sergente maggiore, 27th Battalion, 11th Bersaglieri Regiment, 1st Celere Division 'Eugenio di Savoia'; Yugoslavia

This sergeant-major of the elite light infantry corps is relaxing in shirt sleeve order, which consists of a grey-green flannel shirt with zip collar and his rank chevrons on the left sleeve. (Officers when wearing shirt sleeve order would display above the left breast pocket the same system of rank stars as worn on the side of the *bustina*.) He is proudly wearing the red felt fez with blue tassel which, along with the cockerel feather plume worn on the service hat and helmet, was the main distinction of the Bersaglieri. (The fez was 'presented' as a compliment to their bravery by the French Zouaves, alongside whom the old Sardinian Army fought in the Crimea in 1854-56.) He is about to take a drink from a standard issue water bottle, and he carries his food in the canvas 'tactical bag' at his feet.

A group of Alpini relaxing over a game of cards in a rear area of the Greek Front in 1941 remind us of the motley appearance of troops in the field. Two wear grey-green woollen caps, while the others have the felt Alpine hat without the usual crow's feathers. The Alpino in the centre still wears the M1937 tunic with black-faced upper collar, while the man at far right has the all grey-green M1940. The soldier in the left foreground seems to have cut the sleeves off a standard issue wool sweater. (USSME)

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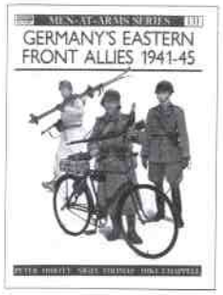

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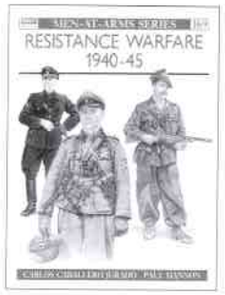

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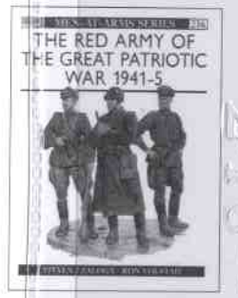

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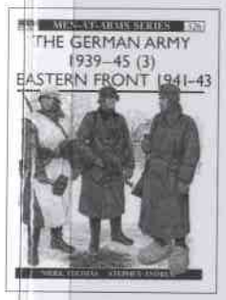

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